British Government strategy in Northern Ireland, 1969-98. An evolutionary analysis

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Abstract

Using the methods of strategic analysis, this work evaluates the British government's approach towards the conflict in Northern Ireland, starting with London's first intervention in 1969, and ending with the signing of the Belfast Agreement in 1998. The British government's aim throughout the period was to achieve the containment of the conflict. In the years 1969-71, it was believed that this aim could be realised by maintaining the existing constitutional structures of Home Rule and Unionist majority rule. The outcomes of this strategy, however, were wholly negative. From 1972, the government's aim translated into the objective of creating political stability through a system of government to which both sides would consent, thus establishing a mutual veto on what was seen as the 'political solution'. It followed that the most important factor to determine London's strategy was the imperative of facilitating political agreement. However, traditional ideas continued to interfere with the conditioning of the strategic instruments, so that London's effectiveness as a political facilitator turned out to be limited. As a consequence, there were two attempts to circumvent the logic of the mutual veto: the notion of producing stability by making Direct Rule from London semi-permanent (1976-79), and the idea of easing the operation of Direct Rule through an inter-governmental framework, resulting in the Anglo-Irish Agreement of 1985. Although both attempts were failures in that they could not achieve what the British government had intended, they nevertheless conditioned the form of agreement that was reached in 1998. The Belfast Agreement made it possible for the British government to realise its objective, yet in allowing some parties to maintain the threat of violence as a means with which to obtain concessions, it suffers from an asymmetry that furthers instability and might well turn out to make the achievement of containment impossible.

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Abbreviations

AIA	Anglo-Irish Agreement
APG	Active, permanent and guaranteed
BBC	British Broadcasting Corporation
CLF	Commander Land Forces (Northern Ireland)
DED	Northern Ireland Department of Economic Development
DSD	Downing Street Declaration (1969)
DUP	Democratic Unionist Party
ECHR	European Court of Human Rights
EEC	European Economic Communities
EPA	Emergency Provisions Act
EU	European Union
FEA	Fair Employment Agency
FEC	Fair Employment Commission
FO	Foreign and Commonwealth Office
GOC	General Officer Commanding (Northern Ireland)
HMG	Her Majesty's Government
IDB	Industrial Development Board
IGC	Inter-Governmental Conference
INLA	Irish National Liberation Army
IR	International Relations
IRA	Irish Republican Army
ITN	Independent Television News
JDP	Joint Declaration for Peace (1993)
JSC	Joint Security Committee
LEDU	Local Economic Development Unit
MoD	Ministry of Defence
MP	Member of Parliament
MPT	Multi-party talks
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NIDA	Northern Ireland Development Agency
NIFC	Northern Ireland Finance Corporation
NIO	Northern Ireland Office
OIRA	Official Irish Republican Army
PIRA	Provisional Irish Republican Army
PRO	Public Record Office
PSF	Provisional Sinn Fein
PTA	Prevention of Terrorism Act
RIC	Royal Irish Constabulary
RIR	Royal Irish Regiment
RTE	Radio Telefis Eireann
RUC	Royal Ulster Constabulary
RUC	Royal Ulster Constabulary
SACHR	Standing Advisory Commission on Human Rights
SAS	Special Air Service
SDLP	Social Democratic and Labour Party
SF	Sinn Fein
SPA	Special Powers Act (Northern Ireland) (1922)
UDA	Ulster Defence Association
UDR	Ulster Defence Regiment
UDR	Ulster Defence Regiment
UK	United Kingdom
USA	United States of America
USC	Ulster Special Constabulary
UUP	Ulster Unionist Party
UUUC	United Ulster Unionist Council
UVF	Ulster Volunteer Force

Abbreviations in figures, tables and footnotes

c.	circa – approximate date of publication
CAB	Cabinet Office
DEFE	Ministry of Defence
FT	Full Time
GB Reg.	Army regiments based in Great Britain
HC	House of Commons Hansard
HL	House of Lords Hansard
n.d.	no stated date of publication
n.p.	no stated place of publication
PT	Part Time
Reg	Regulars
Res	Reserve
w	written answer

1 Introduction

> The mode and thought of men, the whole outlook on affairs, the groupings of parties, all have encountered violent and tremendous changes in the deluge of the world, but as the deluge subsides and the waters fall we see the dreary steeples of Fermanagh and Tyrone emerging once again. The integrity of their quarrel is one of the few institutions that have been left unaltered in the cataclysm which has swept the world.[1]

Winston Churchill's famous quote about the state of the world at the end of the Great War gives a flavour of the feelings of resignation and impatience that have been encountered by British politicians whenever they had to deal with what has traditionally been known as the 'Irish question'. And indeed, once again it might be too early to declare the conflict over. Arguably, what one has witnessed over the course of the current peace process may not be the ending of the conflict but the suppression of it into the politics of threat and coercion.[2] However, since the signing of the so-called Belfast Agreement in April 1998, the province has been closer to peace than ever before in the 30 years of violent conflict. There is no doubt that the Belfast Agreement represents a turning point in the history of the Northern Ireland conflict, and one might contend that since the province has enjoyed relative peace in the past years that the Belfast Agreement provides a good opportunity to mount a systematic examination of the period in its entirety. In this respect, the role of the British government in the Northern Ireland conflict has been pivotal: first, because the conflict has taken place within the jurisdiction of the United Kingdom, and secondly, because it was the sovereignty of the state that has been challenged by Irish Republicans who have tried to break away the six counties of Northern Ireland from the United Kingdom by conducting a military campaign. The question is therefore almost self-evident: how did the British government handle the problem?

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[1] W.S. Churchill, *The World Crisis. The Aftermath* (London 1929), p. 319
[2] M.L.R. Smith, 'Peace in Ulster? A Warning from History', *Jane's Intelligence Review*, July 1998, p. 14

This study is not a policy narrative of the 1969-98 period – indeed, this has been done before. What the author sets out to explore is the way in which the British government has calculated its aims, and how it attempted to achieve them. Hence, what were the aims of British policy in Northern Ireland? How did the government formulate its strategy? How did British government strategy in relation to Northern Ireland evolve? Has it been consistent? What factors conditioned the use of constitutional, security, political, and economic strategies in pursuit of its aims? How well were different strategies co-ordinated? Were they successful? Was there tension between political principle and necessity, that is, did the British government miss opportunities to achieve favourable outcomes as a result of political or ideological constraints?

As a means of assessing the process of strategic change within the British government's position, British policy in relation to Northern Ireland will be made responsive to the assumptions of strategic theory. The actual analysis will be carried out in several stages. In the first part (Chapter 2), some key formative influences on British strategy will be identified. In their entirety, these themes can be taken to represent the 'strategic tradition' of the British government in Northern Ireland. In the second part (Chapters 3-7), the different elements of the British government's strategic tradition will be applied to successive periods of British involvement in Northern Ireland. As a result, one will be able to draw a series of conclusions that attempt to answer the questions that were outlined above (Chapter 8). In this chapter, the foundations of strategic theory are laid down, and it will be explained how the assumptions of strategic theory translate into a robust methodological framework. In addition, a review of the secondary literature will show how this study can make a contribution to the existing literature on the British government in Northern Ireland. Also, a brief historical breakdown will highlight major events in the British governance of (Northern) Ireland prior to the first significant intervention of the British government in the current conflict, the deployment of troops to the province in August 1969.

1.1 Strategic theory

The terms 'strategy' and 'strategic' are widely used in popular discourse, and it often seems that they have now lost any real meaning. Particularly in business, it has become fashionable to employ 'the s-word' in every conceivable context. A keyword search on the Internet, for example, resulted in more than two million webpages containing the word 'strategy', including the 'Strategic Rail Authority' and its 'limited implementation strategy for the strategic network plan'.[3] In the military, on the other hand, the term 'strategy' is traditionally employed in a strictly defined sense. Carl von Clausewitz described strategy as 'the use of engagements for the object of war'.[4] Many generations of so-called military strategists have thus interpreted strategy as the art of applying military power in war.

Both ways of seeing strategy are inadequate. Thinking of strategy in terms of 'somehow long-term' (as business does) is too general to give the term any real meaning, whereas defining strategy exclusively in relation to military power and war appears to be too narrow. Hence, what is strategy? At its most basic level, strategy concerns itself with the 'use of available resources to gain an objective',[5] that is, strategy is about how to employ means to achieve any end. Contrary to some military strategists, who cannot conceive of any instrument different from military power, it is important to emphasise that the chosen means can be of *any* nature. This is what military strategists sometimes call 'grand strategy', that is, 'to coordinate and direct all the resources [available] towards the attainment of the... goal defined by fundamental policy'.[6] It follows that the strategy of a polity can involve military power as well as any other means as long as it is related to the proposed end.

Secondly, strategy needs to be seen as a scenario of at least two players. It is interactive. This assertion relates to the so-called 'theory of games',

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[3] See Strategic Rail Authority; http://www.sra.gov.uk/sra/publications/default.htm
[4] C. von Clausewitz, *On War*, M. Howard and P. Paret (trans. and ed.), (Princeton 1984), p. 128
[5] M. Howard, *The Causes of Wars* (London 1983), p. 36
[6] B.H. Liddell Hart, *Strategy: the Indirect Approach* (London, 1967), p. 335

signifying that there are always at least two participants involved in a strategic situation in which each player tries to maximise his well-being by understanding (as well as anticipating) the behaviour of his opponent. Accordingly, T.C. Schelling defines strategic analysis as 'the art of looking at the problem from the other person's point of view, identifying his opportunities and his interests'.[7] This implies that each player tries to understand the value system of his adversary, even if it is alien to his own.

As strategy is best understood as a set of assumptions rather than a fully fledged theory (see 1.2), the best way of approaching strategic theory is by making its implicit postulates as clear as possible. In the following, strategy will therefore be looked at from three different angles: its relation to Realism, the assumption of instrumentality, and the postulate of rationality in strategic analysis.

Strategy and Realism

Most commonly, strategic analysis is located within the realist tradition of International Relations (IR). This is not obvious, as there is no 'natural' connection between strategy and a specific branch of IR theory. It is even questionable whether strategy should not rather be seen as a general paradigm that can be employed to examine social phenomena of any sort. Whatever one's approach, it is undoubtedly helpful to outline some well-developed concepts of Realism that are shared with strategic analysis. Of these, two themes seem particularly applicable to strategy: the power political approach, and the assumption of moral neutrality.

As S.M. Lynn-Jones points out, Realism is 'not a single, unified theory'. Proponents of Realism disagree on many questions of international relations – some general propositions, however, are shared by almost all of them, including 'the belief that people generally pursue their own interests and that

[7] T.C. Schelling, *Choice and Consequence* (London 1984) p. 200

power determines who gets what in politics',[8] that is, the power political approach. Realists assume that social actors are selfish, and that the currency in which interests are traded is power, and that the application of superior power results in a successful outcome. Therefore, power can – most generally – be defined as an actor's capability to influence outcomes.

What kind of power? Even though most realists would probably agree that physical (that is, military) power is the 'ultimate' form of power, objectives can be realised in many different ways. E.H. Carr's definition of power, for instance, includes both economic and ideological dimensions.[9] K. Waltz (and many other so-called Neo-Realists) measures state power in terms of so-called capabilities, such as military and economic capacities, size of population, political stability, or technological progress.[10] Like strategy, power is not necessarily confined to any specific form or action. Rather, it can be said that power is *any means an actor employs in order to influence an outcome*. Still, in realist thought, military power is regarded as the most potent way of manipulating a situation in a desired way. And although realists are well aware that the threat or the actual use of military power often results in physical violence, the loss of life, pain and deprivation, they accept military hostilities as one way of resolving disputes amongst selfish actors.

The seemingly indifferent attitude towards death and distress leads to another assumption that Realism and strategic analysis have in common: moral neutrality. Realists are not concerned with passing judgments about the justice of a cause. The behaviour of an actor is examined in terms of the choices available, the calculation of interest, and the efficiency of his actions, not primarily in relation to its moral content. This does not mean that realists deny the existence of ethical or moral questions connected to the issues of war and peace, of conflict and conflict resolution. There undoubtedly are such issues, but neither realists nor strategists consider them to be their

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[8] S.M. Lynn-Jones, 'Realism and Security Studies' in C.A. Snyder (ed.), *Contemporary Security and Strategy* (London 1999), p. 54

[9] E.H. Carr, *The Twenty Years Crisis: 1919-39* (London 1946), p. 85

[10] see K. Waltz, 'The Emerging Structure of International Politics', *International Security*, 18: 2 (1993), pp. 44-79

business. Hence, accusations of amorality – even cold-bloodedness – miss the point. As J. Garnett put it:

> [R]esearch into a subject in no way implies approval of it. It is a curious fact that when doctors study malignant carcinomas, no one assumes that they are in favour of cancer, but when political scientists examine war it is assumed all to frequently that they approve of it.[11]

If anything, Realism can be charged with conservatism. Because of its assumed moral neutrality, it tends not to question the status quo – its strength lies in revealing what *is*, not what *ought* to be.

Strategy and instrumentality

Strategic thinking assumes that means are subordinate to ends, that is, in strategy, social actors take autonomous decisions on how to employ the tools at their disposal in order to realise their objectives. For instance, a government might introduce tax credits for high-tech companies as a means of facilitating growth in this sector of the national economy. The instrumental nature of this measure is fairly obvious. It serves to fulfil the ends of a policy that was consciously set by the government. In warlike situations, the reasoning is not altogether different. In fact, Clausewitz argues that 'war is nothing but the continuation of policy with other means'.[12] Consequently, whilst war makes it necessary to employ means that are unknown in periods of peace, war is nevertheless a function of policy. It serves a purpose that is defined by the actor that controls the means. As Clausewitz himself put it: '[War's] grammar, indeed, may be its own, but not its logic'.[13] In short, without policy, there can be no such thing as war.

Moreover, war does not consist of an isolated 'act of force to compel our enemy to do our will',[14] as in Clausewitz's theoretical construct of 'absolute

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[11] J. Garnett, 'Strategic Studies and Its Assumptions' in J. Baylis et al (eds.), *Contemporary Strategy I* (Hertfordshire 1987), p. 12
[12] Clausewitz, *On War*, p. 69
[13] Ibid, p. 605
[14] Ibid., p. 75

war'. In reality, all war is limited from the absolute – both by operational factors (such as technology, logistics, weather etc.), and by its objectives. The objective of war is therefore not necessarily the 'unconditional surrender' of the enemy, and the act of war itself is not a 'single blow' but a series of engagements. Hence, the conduct of war leaves enough time for all participants to change their strategy, and it eases the strictly hierarchical sense in which ends and means are related to each other. In real war, means can indeed inform ends. As a result, some strategists tend not think of war as an archaic force, difficult (if not impossible) to control, but rather in terms of a sophisticated bargaining process – 'vicious' bargaining, but bargaining nevertheless.[15] In strategic theory, bargaining serves the purpose of carefully manipulating incentive structures, so that the cost to comply with one's demands is perceived to be lower than continued resistance: 'If the enemy is to be coerced you must put him in a situation that is even more unpleasant than the sacrifice you call on him to make.'[16] It follows that strategic analysis is all about 'the structure of incentives, of information and communication, the choices available and the tactics that can be employed... [I]t deals with situations in which one party has to think about how the others are going to reach their decisions'.[17]

The logic of bargaining is particularly significant in so-called low-intensity conflicts. Here, a strong side is pitted against a weaker one, for instance, an established government against a revolutionary group. Instead of confronting the stronger side militarily, the weaker side's major political objective might be to gain popular support, whilst at the same worsening the incentive structure of the government through a campaign of force (which may be directed against government institutions and forces, the economy, infrastructure, or simply by waging general terror). For the weaker side, accordingly, a low-intensity conflict requires a highly developed idea of how to use the different tools at its disposal.[18] The stronger side, in turn, could easily crush the weaker side by employing maximum force. This, however,

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[15] T.C. Schelling, *Arms and Influence* (New Haven 1966), p. 2
[16] Clausewitz, *On War*, p. 77
[17] Schelling, *Choice and Consequence*, p. 198
[18] J. Baylis, 'Revolutionary Warfare' in Baylis, *Contemporary Strategy I*, pp. 135-9

does not always happen. In fact, governments often seem to be restrained in the use of force, and one of the aims of strategic analysis might therefore be to find out what factors are limiting the application of maximum force.

Regarding instrumentality, it is also worth pointing out that the concept of 'terrorism' is just one of many tactics at the strategist's disposal. A. Guelke deserves credit for showing how frequently the term 'terrorism' has been abused in order to portray one's opponents as illegitimate and marginal, or to justify draconian sentences.[19] In this study, the use of the term terrorism is not supposed to pass on any moral judgment. Instead, 'terrorism' describes a violent tactic that intends to inspire fear and anxiety amongst a target group. In doing so, the victims of terrorist acts typically serve as 'message generators'.[20] Terrorism will therefore be seen as part of a communication process between perpetrator and target audience. If performed by a non-government actor, terrorism can be part of an insurgency (which is defined as 'an internal struggle in which a disaffected group seeks to gain control of a nation').[21] 'Counterinsurgency' thus describes the constitutional, military, political or economic measures that represent the state's response to the insurgents' challenge.

Strategy and rationality

Strategic analysis examines the behaviour of social actors that are made up of human beings. It is people who decide upon what alternatives to consider, what messages to send, and which options to choose. It follows that, by assuming rationality, strategic analysis sets a standard that no human being can possibly live up to. Hence, is it irrational to postulate rationality?

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[19] A. Guelke, *The Age of Terrorism and the International Political System* (London 1995), p. 23

[20] See A.P. Schmid's definition, quoted in ibid., p. 18

[21] T.R. Mockaitis, *British Counterinsurgency, 1919-60* (London 1990), p. 3

F. Lopez-Alves has explained rationality as 'the endeavour to relate means to ends as efficiently as possible'.[22] Behaving rationally, thus, ideally assumes that actors are in possession of complete information about themselves and their fellow players, and that they are perfectly aware not only of their declared values but also of their unconscious passions and preferences. As one can imagine, it is virtually impossible that such 'strategic man' actually exists. However, as Waltz asserts, 'assumptions are neither true nor false': their value lies in the insights they lead us to.[23] In that sense, assuming rationality helps us to explain a substantial portion of the reasoning of actors that *try* to maximise utility, even though they never completely succeed in doing so. Assuming anything different from rationality would be even less plausible. Therefore, Garnett correctly distinguishes between two levels of strategic analysis:

> First, [strategy] is pursued at the purely rational level at which attention is focused on reasonable, conscious, artful behavior motivated by the cold calculation of interests; and second, at a level that examines the participants in a conflict in all their complexity.[24]

Garnett's two-level approach to rationality allows us to derive insights both on how an actor should have calculated his interests (if he was 'strategic man'), and to what extent his actual reasoning departed from the notion of rationality. Only by doing so, it becomes possible to find out about an actor's underlying cultural and ideological assumptions, and so understand his subjective rationality.

However, if the thinking of an actor was easily divisible into the purely rational part and the remaining strands, one could simply examine what the 'difference' between rational and actual thinking is made up of. Unfortunately, this (almost surgical) method of analysing a thought process is impossible, so that there is no other way but to make informed assumptions about the content of this unknown variable, and then to test and gradually refine them.

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[22] F. Lopez-Alves, 'Political Crises, Strategic Choices, and Terrorism: The Rise and Fall of the Uruguayan Tupamaros', *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 1: 2 (1989), p. 204
[23] K. Waltz, 'Anarchic Orders and Balances of Power', in R.O. Keohane (ed.), *Neorealism and Its Critics* (New York 1986), p. 118
[24] J. Garnett, 'Strategic Studies', p. 19

Clausewitz, for instance, points to the role of elements like chance, uncertainty, and moral strength in war; and he thinks that theory should not ignore them: '[Theory] must also take the human factor into account, and find room for courage, boldness, even foolhardiness. The art of war deals with living and with moral forces. Consequently, it cannot attain the absolute, or certainty'.[25] Although Clausewitz was far from developing a systematic notion of what constitutes a 'strategic tradition', he openly recognised the significance of factors that lie beyond 'objective' rationality. Maybe it is due to his emphasis on intangible influences that many strategists do not consider their field of study a domain of absolute rationality, but instead appreciate ideologies and value systems in explaining the way that actors define the circumstances around them.

In a security context, a strategic tradition can be seen as containing 'the persisting socially transmitted ideas, attitudes, traditions, habits of mind, and preferred methods of operation that are more or less specific to a particular geographically based security community that has had a unique historical experience'.[26] In relation to this study, it will be assumed that the strategic tradition accounts for what was earlier described as the 'unknown variable' (that is, the part of an actor's thinking that cannot be explained by applying pure rationality), and that strategic traditions can be considered in a systematic way by outlining their tenets.

1.2 Methodology

Having outlined the tenets of strategic theory, this section attempts to describe how the assumptions of strategic theory translate into the methodological framework of this study. In addition, it describes what sources have been consulted in the course of the research, and how they were evaluated. Finally, there will be a sub-section on terminological matters to make clear how particular names and expressions are used in the main part of this study.

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[25] Clausewitz, *On War*, p. 86

Assumptions and structure

M.L.R. Smith remarks that the subject of strategic theory 'appears to fall between two stools. Too formalised to be an art. Too loose to be scientific'.[27] In fact, strategy is not even inextricably linked to war, violent conflict or the academic discipline of International Relations. Strategic theory therefore seems to be a very vague concept, and it is necessary to explain why and in what way this approach can be used as a framework for analysing the actions of the British government in Northern Ireland.

Strategic theory, as it will be understood in this study, represents a system of assumptions through which vast amounts of data can be organised, thus guiding the selection of evidence as well as the questions that need to be addressed. Whilst the strategic approach is therefore flexible enough to allow for the uniqueness of a specific phenomenon, the adherence to a framework of assumptions enable the analyst to give the phenomenon in question a wider meaning. In this respect, strategic analysis represents a compromise between the looseness of the historical approach, which (in its purest form) postulates that social phenomena are always unique and incomparable, and the rigidity of frameworks like terrorism studies and counterinsurgency theory, which 'often draw together... varied low level wars by trying to make theoretical generalisations primarily on the basis of tactical modality... thus disconnect[ing them] from their historical and cultural backgrounds'.[28] In short, strategic theory enables contexts to develop whilst preserving an overarching rationale that organises the content in a systematic fashion.

Strategic theory thinks of social actors, such as states or governments, as unitary. At first sight, this appears to be a problematic assumption since states do not have the capacity to think. They are made up of human beings

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[26] C.S. Gray, *Modern Strategy* (Oxford, 1999), p. 131
[27] M.L.R. Smith, *The Role of the Military Instrument in Irish Republican Thinking. An Evolutionary Analysis*, PhD (University of London, 1991), p. 11
[28] M.L.R. Smith, 'Holding Fire: Strategic Theory and the Missing Military Dimension in the Academic Study of Northern Ireland' in A. O'Day (ed.), *Terrorism's Laboratory: The Case of Northern Ireland* (Aldershot 1995), p. 231

who are often organised within complex bureaucratic structures. One might therefore contend that understanding the actions of the British government in Northern Ireland is hardly possible without considering organisational processes, or bureaucratic theory. One might equally argue that the party political orientation of a particular government has to be taken into account, or parliamentary dynamics, the individual predispositions of government ministers, or even – as one author suggests – the number of Irishmen in the parliamentary constituency of the Prime Minister.[29] It is obvious that this study cannot attempt to test, or include, all the different hypotheses on what determines the formulation of government policy. In fact, this qualification applies to *any* systematic examination of British government policy in Northern Ireland, except that other authors have not been as explicit about – or even aware of – the perspective they have chosen. One might therefore argue that strategic theory is *one* possible perspective, indeed *one* level of analysis, and as will be shown, looking at the behaviour of the British government from a strategic point of view can produce new and valuable insights that other approaches have not generated. Undoubtedly, assuming the British government to be a unitary actor will lead to generalisations, and certain aspects of public policy making will not be fully addressed. Yet, doing so helps to focus on the essence of the strategic approach, thus guiding the research process towards finding answers to the questions that have been outlined at the beginning.

Strategic analysts are interested in understanding how means and ends are related in the decisions of an entity, and whether it maintains a value system that can contribute to explaining that decision. If the decision-making entity happens to be the British government, it follows that there should be patterns, traditions or ideological assumptions that transcend the influences that are exerted by the government of the day, the Prime Minister of the day, or the way in which the bureaucracy is organised at one particular point in time. Since the subjective rationality of an entity cannot be understood if one fails to outline the value system that interferes with the 'cold calculation' of

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[29] The Prime Minister in question is Harold Wilson; see P. Rose, 'Labour, Northern Ireland and the Decision to Send in the Troops' in P. Catterall, S. McDougall (eds.), *The Northern Ireland Question in British Politics* (London 1996) p. 90

interest, it will be a substantial part of this thesis to induce several hypotheses about the nature of the value system that appears to have influenced the formulation of British government strategy. Chapter 2 is an attempt to outline the 'strategic tradition' of the British government in Northern Ireland, to derive its different elements, and to demonstrate what policy themes it has translated into. In Chapters 3-7, the strategic tradition of the British government in Northern Ireland is applied to successive periods of British involvement which are assumed to represent distinct segments in the evolution of British strategy. The internal make-up of the respective chapters will follow a topical rather than a chronological order, so that it becomes possible to pursue the respective strategic ideas as thematic units. The overall chronological order enables the reader to trace the evolution of British strategic thought in order to make lines of continuity (or discontinuity) visible.

Sources

After having shown how the strategic approach translates into the structure of this study, it is necessary to explain the way in which the evidence has been gathered. Since this study is a qualitative analysis of British government strategy, it is obvious that most of the evidence takes the form of statements that were made by officeholders in their capacity as representatives of the British government, or in official publications that were released by the British government and its various departments. Thus, primary source material was gathered from parliamentary records (debates as well as answers to written and oral questions in the Houses of Parliament); Cabinet and other government papers as far as they have been released under the thirty year rule; speeches, interviews and statements that were reproduced in national newspapers (*The Times, The Guardian, Daily Telegraph, The Independent*) and magazines (*The Economist, The Spectator, New Statesman*); official documents that were published by Her Majesty's Stationery Office and the Northern Ireland Office; and, to a lesser extent, government leaflets and newspaper advertisements. Furthermore, in addition to every relevant autobiography or published diary, this study draws on more than 30

structured interviews with British ministers and civil servants that have been carried through in the years 2000-02.

Hence, whilst there is no lack of sources, it needs to be pointed out that the sheer amount of evidence made it necessary to conduct the process of evaluating the available sources with great care. Unfortunately, there is no 'golden rule' according to which this process could be explained, but some of the considerations follow what could be described as academic rules of common sense, and are therefore fairly obvious. For example, memoirs and interviews generally provide useful illustrations of government policies as well as much anecdotal evidence, yet they often suffer from what one civil servant described as 'the retrospective adjustment of the record',[30] that is, they benefit from hindsight. Parliamentary speeches and official documents, on the other hand, are careful expositions of government policies, yet sometimes excessive caution has deprived them of any real meaning. Most importantly, they have to be seen in context, that is, in terms of the purpose they serve, the audience they address, and the political constraints they were subject to. In this regard, it has therefore proved essential to consolidate one's background knowledge through a review of the existing secondary literature, which provided a sound foundation on which to base one's judgements.

Terminology

Having described the process of gathering evidence, it is useful to clarify the meaning of some expressions, terms and names that will be used throughout this study. Northern Ireland is what sociologists call a 'deeply divided society'. It is less obvious, however, what name to use when one refers to the respective constituents of that society. The denominational division 'Protestant' versus 'Catholic' is just one of many possible fault lines, and although it might be very popular, it is not the most precise way to divide the population into two groups. Some authors have therefore referred to

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[30] Sir Quentin Thomas, interview with author, 20 February 2002

'Unionists' and 'Nationalists', others have described them as 'settlers' and 'natives', or as 'Ulster British' and 'Ulster Irish'. Even though none of the solutions seems perfect, the author decided to use the terms Catholic and Protestant as well as Unionist and Nationalist interchangeably. Unionists are most likely to be Protestant, and they want Northern Ireland to remain part of the United Kingdom. Nationalists are mostly Catholic and in favour of a united Ireland. Moreover, since there are fewer Catholics in Northern Ireland than Protestants, the respective groups will also be described as 'minority' and 'majority'. The terms Loyalism and (Irish) Republicanism are the more radical (and often militant) expressions of Unionism and Nationalism.

'Great Britain' is used to denote what is sometimes called 'the British mainland', that is, England, Scotland and Wales. The United Kingdom, on the other hand, consists of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. 'Ireland' means the geographical unit of the island of Ireland. The now independent part of Ireland is referred to as 'Republic of Ireland'; the six counties that have stayed with the United Kingdom after the Anglo-Irish Treaty of 1921 are 'Northern Ireland'. Other names (such as 'Ulster', 'the North', the 'North of Ireland', or the 'Six Counties') may nevertheless appear in quotes. 'Derry-City' is the name of the city, whereas 'Londonderry' will be used for the county. The government of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland will be referred to as the 'British government', 'Westminster', or simply 'London'. Likewise, 'Dublin' or 'Irish government' are names used for the government of the Republic of Ireland. 'Stormont' is shorthand for the Northern Ireland Home Rule government as it existed between 1920 and 1972. Further, the official title of the 'agreement reached in multi-party negotiations' in April 1998 is the 'Belfast Agreement', even though the more colloquial term 'Good Friday Agreement' is equally popular.

Within the discipline of War Studies, there has been some debate about whether so-called low-intensity conflicts could be labelled 'wars', and some authors are using an entirely different category, 'small wars'. In order to avoid getting caught in this dispute, the Troubles (as the inhabitants of Northern Ireland call it) will be referred to as 'conflict'. This term was chosen because a

war is always a conflict, whereas a conflict might not necessarily be a war (according to one's respective definition of war). Also, it is helpful to distinguish between the use of the terms 'aim' and 'objective'. In this study, the word 'aim' means the general intention of an actor, for example 'to minimise political involvement in Northern Ireland'. 'Objective', on the other hand, describes the specific concept this intention has translated into, such as 'devolution and power-sharing'. As will be seen, similar aims can lead to entirely different objectives. The terms 'force' and 'violence' will be used interchangeably. Although the English language tends to associate 'force' with the 'legitimate' use of physical violence, in the case of Northern Ireland, it is not easy to decide what is legitimate, as some readers of this study might think of the same institutions as legitimate that others see as illegitimate.

1.3 Literature review

At first sight, it seems impossible to find an easy way through the vast amount of research on the conflict in Northern Ireland, and it appears even more difficult to identify a gap in the existing literature so that a truly original contribution can be made. Taking into account the available space, an all-encompassing survey of the literature on Northern Ireland would be impractical. The author of this study will nevertheless demonstrate that there are few systematic analyses that are exclusively dedicated to the British government, and there are even fewer authors who have consciously attempted to include strategic perspectives in their work.

Works on the British government in Northern Ireland

Academic views of the British government in Northern Ireland are diverse, and any attempt to categorise the various works is bound to lead to generalisations. However, for the sake of clarity, it is useful to divide the contributions according to the ideological standpoint of the respective author. The first school of thought regards the British government as a 'neutral

arbiter' which has succeeded in 'managing' the conflict more or less effectively. In this regard, M. Cunningham's *British Government Policy in Northern Ireland* (1991, 2001), R. Raatz' *Der Nordirlandkonflikt und die britische Nordirlandpolitik seit 1968* (1988) and M. Wallace's *British Government in Northern Ireland* (1982) provide extensive narratives of British policy and are invaluable as reference sources, yet they fail to produce any compelling analysis. In contrast, in *The Irish Question in British Politics, 1868-1996* (1996), the distinguished historian D.G. Boyce traces Westminster's treatment of Ireland from the days of Gladstone until the very recent past, arguing that London's reluctance to accept the Irish Question as a 'British problem' resulted in negligence and inconsistency. Likewise, albeit from the perspective of a political scientist, B. O'Duffy's 'The Price of Containment: Deaths and Debate on Northern Ireland in the House of Commons, 1968-94' (in P. Catterall's and S. McDougall's edition *The Northern Ireland Question in British Politics* [1996]) concludes that the actions of the British government were largely determined by the desire to contain the conflict's violent aspects. In a stalwart analysis of the British government, *The British State and the Ulster Crisis* (1985), P. Bew and H. Patterson argue that London's half-hearted attempts to resolve the conflict have resulted in 'institutionalism' as well as the failure to introduce sweeping reforms in the socio-economic sphere. The result, Bew and Patterson argue, was an entrenchment of the sectarian divide. In *The Politics of Antagonism* (1996), J. McGarry and B. O'Leary contend that despite London's efforts to be neutral, there has been a 'structural bias' of the British government in favour of the Unionist position that needs to be balanced by the further inclusion of the Republic of Ireland in the government of Northern Ireland, possibly in the form of joint authority as a durable solution to the conflict. P. Arthur's analysis of the peace process, *Special Relationships. Britain, Ireland and the Northern Ireland problem* (2000) is an equally thorough study, but differs from most conventional analyses in that it accentuates the significance of organisational processes and personalities. Lastly, P. Dixon's *Northern Ireland – the Politics of War and Peace* (2001) provides the most recent analysis of the Troubles, including the first attempt to give the British government some credit for the peace process.

From a Unionist point of view, the British government has been anything but an 'honest broker'. On the contrary, for Unionist authors, recurring themes are London's supposed sympathy for the idea of a united Ireland, its refusal to govern the province like any other part of the United Kingdom, and the alleged lack of determination in 'fighting terrorism'. Accordingly, in *Under Siege: Ulster Unionism and the Anglo-Irish Agreement* (1989), A. Aughey's argument is based on the assumption that the British government has never really accepted the Britishness of the Northern Ireland Unionists. Likewise, A. Alcock's *Understanding Ulster* (1994) and T.E. Utley's *Lessons of Ulster* (1975) contend that, had it not been for the threat of the Unionists to take up arms, the British government would have had no hesitations to force the British majority into a united Ireland. In a more recent publication – *The Price of Peace: an analysis of British policy in Northern Ireland* (2000) – the journalist M. Gove updates this argument to include the current peace process.

Although there are differences of emphasis, most authors of the Nationalist school would agree that 'British rule in Ireland' is a relic from Westminster's colonial past, and that the British government continues to be biased in favour of the Unionist position. M. Farrell's *Northern Ireland: The Orange State* (1976) and D. Reed's *The Key to the British Revolution* (1984) represent the traditional view of Irish Republicans. Reed and – to a lesser extent – Farrell maintain that the British government continues to pursue its so-called 'strategic interests' in Ireland, namely to prevent the emergence of a 'British Cuba' from which revolution would spread to the British mainland. In 'Modern Irish Republicanism: The Product of British State Strategies' (*Irish Political Studies*, 10:1 [1995]), A. McIntyre updates Reed and Farrell's argument. Like O'Leary and McGarry, he writes about the 'structural' rather than intentional bias of the British presence, but he eventually arrives at the same conclusion as Reed, namely that the British government's main aim has been to suppress the Irish people's demand for self-determination. L. O'Dowd's *Northern Ireland between Civil Rights and Civil War* (1980) is an effective and systematic investigation into the changes that have been

brought about by the introduction of Direct Rule in 1972, yet in concluding that the 'imperial link' remains repressive and unreformable, O'Dowd and the other contributors to this edition support the 'Green Marxist' view of the British government. Despite its clear ideological focus, O'Dowd's work is informative, well-organised and provides much background on the impact of several micro-policies, such as housing and community politics.

Specialist studies

The variety of literature dealing with specific aspects of the British government in Northern Ireland is intriguing. The contributions can roughly be divided into those that concern themselves with issues, and those that deal with events. Most of the issue related literature is dedicated to security or economic policy. Tony Geraghty's *The Irish War* (1998) gives an impressive introduction to the military history of the current conflict. M. Dewar's *The British Army in Northern Ireland* (1996) and D. Hamill's *Pig in the Middle: The Army in Northern Ireland, 1969-84* (London 1985) focus on the involvement of the British Army. Many studies of the so-called 'intelligence war' (covert operations and special units) have been produced by journalists. For example, M. Dillon's *The Secret War* (1988) and R. Faligot's *Britain's Military Strategy in Ireland: the Kitson Experiment* (1983) are addictive reading, yet highly contestable. The most balanced treatment of the issue is M. Urban's *Big Boys' Rules. The SAS and the Secret Struggle against the IRA* (1992), which examines the allegations against the security forces in a sober and thorough fashion. There are two standard works on the predecessor of the Police Service of Northern Ireland, the Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC). C. Ryder's *The RUC: A Force Under Fire* (1989) is the account of a Belfast-based journalist, whilst R.J. Weitzer's *Policing under Fire* (1995) is a more academic treatment of policing in a deeply divided society. Regarding economic and social policy, B. Rowthorn and N. Wayne provide a well-structured introduction to all the issues at stake: *Northern Ireland: The Political Economy of Conflict* (1988). In *Discrimination and Public Policy in Northern Ireland* (1991), R.J. Cormack and R.D. Osborne deal with the

question of how public policy has tackled the issue of discrimination and relative inequality. V. McCormack's *Enduring Inequality* (1990) is a comprehensive guide to the issue of fair employment policy.

The amount of secondary literature on specific events or periods defies imagination. The actions of the British government (and its agencies) have often turned out to be controversial, and it would take a chapter in its own right if one attempted to review all the publications that have been generated by events like 'Bloody Sunday' in 1972. Some works on specific periods of British involvement in Northern Ireland deserve to be mentioned nevertheless. Rose's study *How the Troubles Came to Northern Ireland* (2000) is the most authoritative exposition of British Northern Ireland policy in the immediate lead up to the intervention in 1969. The Sunday Times Insight Team's *Ulster* (1972) gives a unique account of the early phase of British involvement. An English journalist, R. Fisk, authored *The Point of No Return* (1975), a comprehensive and well-informed *exposé* of the fall of the power-sharing Executive in 1974. In *The Uncivil Wars* (1983) and *Questions of Nuance* (1990), P. O'Malley dedicates one chapter each to the thinking of the British government of the day. His treatment of the Hunger Strikes in 1980 and 1981, *Biting at the Grave* (1990), is impressively well researched. A. Kenny's *The Road to Hillsborough* (1986) describes the various events and developments that have contributed to the conclusion of the Anglo-Irish Agreement in 1985. D. Bloomfield's *Political Dialogue in Northern Ireland. The Brooke Initiative, 1989-92* (1989) as well as *Developing Dialogue in Northern Ireland. The Mayhew Talks, 1992* (2001) offer the only extensive analyses of the so-called Brooke/Mayhew talks, which have generally received little attention by academics. The books and press articles of two senior journalists, E. Mallie and D. McKittrick, are always thoroughly researched, albeit sometimes slightly overbalanced towards the Nationalist point of view: *The Fight for Peace: the Inside Story of the Irish Peace Process* (1996, 1997) is a compelling narrative of the years 1990 to 1996. Surprisingly, the most detailed analysis of the Belfast Agreement was written by a lawyer, A. Morgan. In *The Belfast Agreement: a practical legal analysis* (2000), he explains the accord from the perspective of a legal expert, thus

shedding much light on how the agreement changes the constitutional and political status quo in theory as well as in political practice.

Memoirs

Whilst politicians have traditionally seen the Irish Question as an alien element in British politics, many have nevertheless come to regard their involvement in its resolution as a fascinating challenge. Still, some of the products of this fascination need to be treated with caution, mainly because of the understandable desire to readjust one's record retrospectively (see 1.2). The autobiographies of two Prime Ministers – Margaret Thatcher's *Downing Street Years* (1993) and Edward Heath's *The Course of My Life* (1998) – are striking examples of this tendency. John Major's *John Major. The Autobiography* (1999), on the other hand, appears to be a largely genuine defence of his record as Prime Minister in the 1990s. James Callaghan encountered the conflict in three functions: as Home Secretary, Foreign Secretary as well as Prime Minister. Whilst his autobiography *Time and Chance* (1987) contains little on the province, his involvement in 1969-70 resulted in a separate book, *A House Divided* (1973), which is a useful and detailed exploration of London's early response to the outbreak of the Troubles. Prime Minister Harold Wilson's *The Labour Government, 1964-70* (1971) as well as *Final Term: the Labour Government, 1974-1976* (1979) provide another view of the same period, even if Wilson's second publication contains few novel insights. Of the eleven Northern Ireland Secretaries in the 1969-98 period, five have yet published autobiographies. With *Northern Ireland: a personal perspective* (1985), Merlyn Rees has dedicated an entire book to the issue. Based on his diaries, it is well written and gives a good impression of the way the British government has formulated its strategy at the time. Equally, Marjorie Mowlam's recently published *Momentum* (2002) gives a compelling insight into how the British government has managed the period of multiparty talks in 1997-98. Roy Mason's *Paying the Price* (1999) and James Prior's *A Balance of Power* (1986) dedicate several chapters each to Northern Ireland, and deserve to be considered as essential reading

for every serious student of British government policy. The same is true for William Whitelaw's *The Whitelaw Memoirs* (1986), even if Whitelaw manages to describe what one would have imagined to be a demanding and eventful time (the years 1972-73) in a rather dull and uninspired fashion. From a British perspective, other significant contributions include the reflections of the longest-serving British minister in the province, Richard Needham's *Battling for Peace* (1998), as well as the autobiographies of two civil servants, Maurice Hayes' *Minority Verdict* (1995) and Kenneth Bloomfield's *Stormont in Crisis* (1994), all of which provide much anecdotal evidence. Finally, no autobiographical review is complete without reference to Garret FitzGerald and his memoirs *All in a Life* (1991), which reflect his extensive involvement as a member of several Irish governments. It also provides the definitive narrative for the Anglo-Irish *rapprochement* in the 1980s.

Originality

The aim of this section has been to highlight the variety of secondary literature on the British government in Northern Ireland. Yet, the intention has also been to identify a gap in the existing literature, so that a truly original contribution to this particular area of academic interest can be made. In this respect, one might conclude that the originality of this study rests on a variety of pillars, each one of which demonstrates that this work is a valuable addition to the academic study of the Northern Ireland conflict. First, even if there are some studies which have looked at British policy in detail, they are either outdated or present no more than a policy narrative with little analytical value. This study, on the other hand, represents the first comprehensive single-actor analysis from the outbreak of the Troubles in 1969 to what many believe to be their conclusion, that is, the Belfast Agreement in 1998. Second, despite the frequent use of the word 'strategy' by many authors, strategic approaches are virtually non-existent in the vast amount of literature on the Northern Ireland conflict.[31] This study will thus represent a useful

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[31] It is worth pointing out that there are some truly strategic analyses of the conflict, albeit dealing with actors other than the British government. M. O'Doherty's *The Trouble With Guns*

addition to the existing body of strategic analyses. In turn, it is hoped that this work will be a valuable contribution to the study of low-intensity conflict within the discipline of strategic theory, as Northern Ireland is one of the few cases in which a liberal democratic state had to cope with a prolonged period of internal conflict. Third, drawing on a vast range of primary sources, including recently released government papers, the minutes of the multiparty talks in 1997-98, as well as more than 30 structured interviews with leading members of the government and the civil service, the author of this study has uncovered many details, views and statements that have not previously been in the public domain. In this regard, this work represents a valuable expansion of the academic knowledge base from which future studies in this field will undoubtedly benefit.

1.4 Historical Background

Regarding the main part of this study, it is important to introduce the historical background to what happened in the 1969-98 period, partly because some lines of continuity will become obvious, but also because history has provided an ideological focus as well as reference point for politicians, academics and journalists. As this study gets to the heart of one of the greatest controversies in Irish historiography, it comes as no surprise that much of what will be dealt with is disputed. In post-independence Ireland, historiography traditionally served the purpose of reinforcing the myth of a subjugated people united in their fight against an abusive and alien power. Only in the mid-1960s, a group of historians (the initial 'Revisionists') began to question these assumptions. They proved that it was possible to look at Irish history from a rather different perspective. Many Revisionists, for example, researched the economic and social history of Ireland; they looked at events within an international framework; and they discovered the diversity of social forces in Irish society. In turn, this more pluralist and less committed attitude has

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(1998) and M.L.R. Smith's *Fighting for Ireland? The Military Strategy of the Irish Republican Movement* (1995) investigate the evolution of Republican strategy.

recently been attacked by a number of young Nationalist historians.[32] Since the debate continues, it is the aim of this author to be outspoken about points of ongoing disagreement.

Ireland before 1800

Nationalist historians believe that Anglo-Irish history started in the year 1170 when Strongbow and other Norman adventurers invaded Ireland at the invitation of the Gaelic chief of the province of Leinster. The so-called Old English, however, did not consider themselves to be missionaries of the Norman crown, and it is arguable whether they could be considered 'English' at all.[33] Instead, they arranged themselves with the leaders of the Gaelic tribes, and they only maintained a shadowy association to their homeland. Many of them became distinctly Gaelic, so that they were eventually referred to as '*hiberniores hibernis ipsos* – "more Irish than the Irish"'.[34] This (rather loose) relation between the two islands only started to change in the 16th century. The Tudors, and in particular Henry VIII, were committed to a centralising monarchy, and they saw themselves challenged by the rising power of the Old English House of Kildare. More importantly, Henry's split from Rome and the subsequent failure of Reformation to take root in Ireland transformed the hitherto insignificant island into a potential threat – a backdoor from which England's enemies could launch an invasion. Henry therefore tried to strengthen the ties between the Irish Earls and the Tudor dynasty. Only Elizabeth I, however, succeeded in defeating any opposition to the English crown. When she died in 1603, the monarchy 'could properly claim to have conquered most of Ireland, though English government still hardly impinged upon the lives of the mass of Irish people'.[35]

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[32] See G.D. Boyce, A. O'Day, 'Introduction. Revisionism and the Revisionist Controversy' in G.D. Boyce, A. O'Day (eds.), *The Making of Modern Irish History. Revisionism and the Revisionist Controversy* (London 1996), pp. 1-14

[33] R. Kee, *The Green Flag Volume 1. The Most Distressful Country* (London 1989), p. 9

[34] Ibid., p. 10

[35] P. Adelman, *Great Britain and the Irish Question, 1800-1922* (Abingdon 1996), p. 3

Shortly after Elizabeth's death, the Plantation of Ulster with settlers from Scotland and England began. Although there might be some truth in saying that the establishment of a Protestant community in Ireland was part of a deliberate policy to subjugate the island and its population, the Ulster Plantation can as well be seen in the context of the first English settlements in New England and Virginia which reflected the pioneering spirit of that age. Even so, the consequences of the Ulster plantation were to spread the seeds of civil strife. The so-called New English not only had a different religious allegiance from the Catholic majority, they also took their land. When the thrust of the settlements was completed in 1610, 'there had been established a province with two mutually antagonistic communities'.[36]

This antagonism resulted in repeated bloodshed, such as the Catholic rebellion in 1641, the Cromwellian re-conquest of Ireland in 1649, and the Williamite wars that concluded with the battles of the Boyne and Aughrim (1690 and 1691). Each time, the two segments of the population of Ireland found themselves on opposing sides of the respective argument. Nevertheless, regarding the issue of English control over Ireland, things were not as clear-cut as they seem. First, from the perspective of the English political elites, the wars of the 17th century were not so much about Ireland but rather about the question of who was to hold power in England. Also, the Williamite wars at the end of the century had a European dimension with England fighting alongside the Pope and the so-called 'Grand Alliance' against the expansionist aspirations of France. Second, from the perspective of the Irish Catholic population, the wars were not about the principle of English control either. In the Williamite wars, the Catholics were happy to ally themselves with King James II, as long as this resulted in an improved position *vis-à-vis* the Protestant population.

For most of the following century, there had been relative tranquillity in Ireland. Some historians argue that the Anglo-Irish relationship in the 18th century was 'quintessentially a colonial one', that is to say, the Irish were

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[36] S. McMahon, *A Short History of Ireland* (Dublin 1996), p. 76

subordinated to foreign domination and exploitation.[37] Others think that the power structures within Ireland as well as between the two islands were typical of the so-called *ancien régimes* all over Europe.[38] Whatever one's point of view, there is no doubt that the Anglican elites within the Protestant population used the relative peace to establish a so-called Ascendancy which dominated the structures of economic and political power.[39] The winning of legislative independence for the Irish parliament in 1782 was the ultimate manifestation of Irish-Protestant self-confidence and patriotism. It follows that English central control, before and after 1782, was largely informal. It was exercised through the Lord-Lieutenant, the administration at Dublin Castle, and through a system of 'undertakers' which secured parliamentary majorities in return for patronage.[40] Also, it was the first time the 'Irish question' – the question of what constitutional relationship should exist between Britain and Ireland – was effectively articulated.

The long peace of the 18th century only ended in its last decade. The Republican rebellion of the 1790s was encouraged by the revolutions in North America and France. Theobald Wolfe Tone, a Presbyterian lawyer who founded the Society of United Irishmen in 1791, articulated the principle of the unity of the Irish people regardless of their creed, and the idea of a separation from England.[41] However, desperate for the support of the largely apolitical secret societies in which the Catholic peasantry was organised, the United Irishmen needed to appeal to sectarian prejudices, which appeared to have a far greater effect on mobilising the Catholic population than the battle cry for a Republic. The ensuing battles between the secret societies and the Protestant Orangemen (the Orange Order was founded in 1795) deepened the divisions, and the unrest which had been caused by the insurrection ultimately resulted in London resuming the direct government of the island.

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[37] R. Douglas, L. Harte, J. O'Hara, *Ireland since 1690* (Belfast 1999), p. 13

[38] S.J. Connolly, 'Eighteenth-Century Ireland. Colony or Ancien Régime?' in Boyce, *The Making*, p. 26

[39] The term 'Protestant Ascendancy' is somehow misleading, as it was in fact only the landowning Anglican minority of the Protestant population that controlled land as well as parliament.; see J.C. Beckett, *Geschichte Irlands* (Stuttgart 1997), p. 133

[40] Connolly, 'Eighteenth-Century Ireland', p. 23

[41] Some revisionists claim that Tone's endorsement of equal rights for the Catholic majority was less than genuine, and that his attitude towards the Catholic peasantry was

The English government's initial response to the developments in Ireland was a half-hearted mixture of reform and suppression. On the one hand, some of the anti-Catholic laws were repealed. On the other hand, Prime Minister William Pitt the Younger needed to crush the 1798 rebellion decisively if he wanted to avoid another blow to the integrity of the British Empire after his predecessor had suffered defeat in what were now the United States of America (USA). Since no English troops were readily available, the government resorted to Protestant militias, and thus to the principle of *divide et impera*. As the then Lord-Lieutenant put it: 'Religious animosities increase, and, I am sorry to say, are encouraged by the foolish violence of all the principal persons who have been in the habit of governing this island'.[42]

Ireland and the Union

The Act of Union (1801) abolished the Irish parliament in Dublin. Traditionally, historians have seen the Union as a final attempt to uphold the British connection, and to sustain Protestant supremacy within Ireland. Thus, the Union, it is argued, laid the roots for a conflict between supporters of the British connection and Nationalism that, as O. MacDonagh has it, 'deepened, extended, and intensified, not steadily, but in successive waves', and which 'reached its apotheosis in the proclamation of a Republic in Easter week, 1916'.[43] Contrary to this teleological interpretation, revisionists regard the Union as a stable political arrangement which 'facilitated constitutional opposition and an apprenticeship in democratic politics, and it ensured a degree of internal and external security that was conducive to social and economic development'.[44]

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instrumental; see T. Dunne, *Theobald Wolfe Tone: An Analysis of His Political Philosophy* (Cork 1982), pp. 17-18

[42] Lord Cornwallis, quoted in G.M. Trevelyan, *British History in the Nineteenth Century and After, 1782-1919* (London 1965), p. 113

[43] O. MacDonagh, *Ireland* (Englewood Cliffs 1968), pp. 2-3

[44] L. Kennedy, D.S. Johnson, 'The Union of Ireland and Britain, 1801-1921' in Boyce, *The Making*, p. 64

Initially, Irish Catholics, and indeed leading members of the clergy, supported the idea of the Union. Not only was it seen as guaranteeing external security and paving the way for economic improvements – the Catholics were also sympathetic to Pitt's endorsement of Emancipation, that is, the right of Catholics to take public office. Pitt thought that Catholic grievances needed to be addressed if Ireland was to be pacified for good. On this occasion, nevertheless, Emancipation failed, and when it eventually succeeded, in 1829, it had been preceded by a massive campaign by Daniel O'Connell, a Catholic lawyer from Dublin. Although he later campaigned for the repeal of the Union, O'Connell believed in some sort of connection with England.[45] In particular, his willingness to work within the British framework was demonstrated by his coalition with Whigs and Radicals (1835-41). These years were referred to as a 'golden era' for the Irish Catholic middle class, because Catholic lawyers and businessmen benefited from government patronage as much as the Protestants had done before.[46]

Only a few years later, the so-called Famine years came to symbolise everything that was wrong with the Union. Nationalists have traditionally thought about the actions of the British government in terms of a deliberate 'genocide' (or even 'Holocaust').[47] The debate about the Famine in Irish historiography has thus centred around the question as to whether the government's response to the potato blight in Ireland was adequate, and particularly, why London acted as it did. In fact, during the first winter of the Famine, Tory Prime Minister Robert Peel co-ordinated a swift and effective relief campaign. Only when Lord Russell succeeded him in 1846, the government's attitude changed abruptly. On the one hand, this was due to the Whigs' strong belief in non-intervention and free trade. As a consequence, public relief schemes were abandoned, and the selling of Irish potatos abroad continued.[48] Secondly, and perhaps more importantly, there was widespread confusion at Whitehall: ignorance, lack of knowledge, and

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[45] R.F. Foster, *Modern Ireland, 1600-1972* (London 1989), p. 301
[46] Ibid., pp. 309-11
[47] For an example of the Nationalist view of the Famine, see the Irish Famine/Genocide Committee pressure group; http://www.ifgc.org

mismanagement led to English civil servants – in the words of a contemporary – being 'as fairly bewildered in the wilds of Connaught as if they had fallen among the aboriginees of Timbucktoo'.[49] None of this confirms the Nationalist suspicion of government intent, although it does not diminish the government's responsibility for a catastrophe that had clearly been avoidable. In the case of the Famine, as for most of the 19th century, London's response to a crisis in Ireland was one of initial disinterest, aloofness, and – when things became acute – crisis management. In this respect, however, Westminster's reaction to the Famine was not much different from its treatment of the potato blight in Scotland which happened in the same decade.[50] In the words of C. Townshend: '[I]f British government in Ireland was in a sense despotic, it was a despotism tempered by both inefficiency and indifference'.[51] This certainly makes an excellent case for independence, except that at the time of the Famine and in the decade thereafter, no one made it (notwithstanding the so-called Young Irelanders whose attempted rebellion in 1848 failed to attract any measurable popular support).[52]

This only changed in the last quarter of the century. Successive land acts failed to solve the more general economic problems of an island that was geographically remote and largely dependent on agriculture. Isaac Butt and Charles Stewart Parnell (both Protestants) managed to transform the latent social discontent of the Catholic masses into a question of self-governance, and by 1880, Parnell was the undisputed leader of a unified Home Rule Party that fought for the restoration of legislative independence. From a British perspective, however, the Irish question had several dimensions. First, it was one of party political significance since both Tories and Liberals needed Irish support in the House of Commons if they wanted to form stable governments (when Parnell had eventually aligned himself with the Liberals, the Tories

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[48] The latter was not regarded as in any way special to the Irish case: 'The idea that food produced in the country should not be exported was not adopted anywhere [in Europe], and would have been considered an economic irrelevance.'; see Foster, *Modern Ireland*, p. 325

[49] 'Modern Ireland', *Ulster Magazine*, 1:1 (1860), quoted in P. Bew, 'The National Question, Land, and "Revisionism"' in Boyce, *The Making*, p. 93

[50] Foster, *Modern Ireland*, p. 320

[51] C. Townshend, 'British Policy in Ireland, 1906-1921' in D.G. Boyce (ed.), *The Revolution in Ireland, 1879-1923* (London 1988), p. 175

decided to ally themselves with the Irish Unionists). Secondly, a new settlement for Ireland was perceived as a precedent for the British Empire at large. It was, as D.G. Boyce holds, 'inextricably bound up with the future of the British constitution, and more important, the British nation'.[53] Lastly, the Irish question was one of how to strike a fair balance between the interests of the different communities, so that the island would eventually be pacified.

At the end of the 19th century, British politicians had found two main answers to the Irish question. One was Home Rule, which would have granted independence to a Dublin parliament in a range of areas, but at the same time would have maintained the constitutional link to the United Kingdom. This idea was advocated by the Liberal Party and particularly Prime Minister William Gladstone who introduced Home Rule Bills in 1886 and in 1893. The 1886 Bill split the Liberal Party and thus failed to receive a majority in the House of Commons. The second Bill passed the House of Commons but was rejected in the House of Lords.[54] The other answer was what historians have called 'constructive Unionism'. This meant that instead of self-government, London would address the major social and economic grievances directly, and thus try to 'kill Home Rule with kindness',[55] as one popular phrase had it. This policy was advanced by the Conservative governments of Robert Salisbury and Arthur Balfour (1886 to 1905), and it included a final solution of the land question which '[converted] the tenant farmers into peasant proprietors'.[56] Throughout the Union period, however, neither Liberals nor Tories hesitated to introduce Coercion Bills when they found tougher measures necessary to suppress the civil unrest which resulted from sectarian strife. Hence, although Tories and Liberals disagreed on the significance of the constitutional question, both parties practised a moderate reformist and pragmatic mixture of coercion and conciliation when in government.

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[52] G. Costigan, *A History of Modern Ireland* (New York 1969), p. 205
[53] D.G. Boyce, *The Irish Question and British Politics, 1868-1996* (London 1996), p. 7
[54] See J. Smith, *Britain and Ireland: From Home Rule to Independence* (Harlow 2000), pp. 35-43
[55] Ibid., p. 47
[56] N. Mansergh, *The Irish Question, 1840-1921* (London 1965), p. 288

When the Liberals returned to power, Home Rule was back on the agenda. The introduction of a modest Home Rule Bill in 1912 was sufficient to alarm the Unionists in Ulster, albeit not enough to satisfy the aspirations of Asquith's allies, the Irish Nationalists. In the following years, Ireland saw the radicalisation and militarisation of the conflict over Home Rule with Unionists and (then) Nationalists forming paramilitary organisations to defend their respective causes. Under these circumstances, the partition of Ireland into two Home Rule areas appeared to be the only possible means to appease the Protestant Northeast of the island. Still, none of the suggested solutions (under headings like 'county option', 'temporary exclusion' or 'home rule within home rule') seemed to please both communities. Arguably, civil war was only prevented by the outbreak of the First World War, which, in Asquith's words, 'dwarfed the Ulster and Nationalist Volunteers to their true proportion'.[57]

After the Easter Rising of 1916, a moderate solution along the lines of the suggested Home Rule Bill seemed even less likely. As support for the constitutional Nationalists dwindled, the more radical party *Sinn Fein* became the predominant force in Irish Nationalism. Nevertheless, instead of executing a 'reign of terror' in response to the Republican challenge,[58] the British government continued its programme of constitutional proposals, whilst the increased violence forced it to gradually move towards repression. Consequently, the year 1920 saw the eventual implementation of two Home Rule parliaments as well as the introduction of the Blacks and Tans, the notorious auxiliary force of the Royal Irish Constabulary (RIC). Even so, the Irish could not 'be compelled to be reasonable', and in 1921, the British strategy of coercion and conciliation ultimately failed.[59] The Anglo-Irish Treaty of December granted dominion status to the 26 counties of the 'South' and left the constitutional status of the Home Rule area of (what was now) Northern Ireland untouched.

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[57] Asquith, quoted in Townshend, 'British Policy', p. 181
[58] D. Reed, *Ireland. The Key to the British Revolution* (London 1984), p. 56
[59] Townshend, 'British Policy', p. 187

Northern Ireland, 1921-69

According to the Government of Ireland Act (1920), the Northern Ireland government at Stormont held powers in a wide range of so-called 'transferred' matters which included, amongst others, security and electoral arrangements. Although the supreme authority of the British parliament was reaffirmed in Section 75 of the 1920 Act, Westminster refrained from legislating in matters that were considered to be the responsibility of Stormont. As a result, the Northern Ireland government was what I. Budge and C. O'Leary term 'a self-governing province with some of the trappings of sovereignty'.[60] This lack of legislative control was of no worry to various British governments. On the contrary, the settlements of 1920 and 1921 removed the Irish question from British politics, and British decision-makers were determined not to allow it back on the agenda. At Westminster, the unspoken consensus seemed to have been that the best policy with regards to Ireland was to leave Irish matters to the Irish, that is, to exercise as little control as possible. As Boyce put it: there was a 'desire to avoid opening up an issue that could bring nothing but trouble to the British government, perhaps even landing it with the unenviable task of resuming the government of Northern Ireland'.[61] The parameters of this policy did not change, even when it became obvious that the Unionist Party had secured the existence of the threatened province by establishing a system of government that systematically excluded the Catholic minority from positions of power and influence.[62] Contact between Westminster and Stormont – most commonly through Home Office or Treasury – was restricted to what was absolutely necessary. Moreover, as a result of (Southern) Irish independence, the number of Irish seats in the House of Commons decreased to a mere dozen, so that the party political significance of the Irish vote withered. The party ties – particularly between Conservatives and Unionists – gradually loosened,

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[60] I. Budge, C. O'Leary, *Belfast: Approach to Crisis – A Study of Belfast Politics, 1613-1970* (London 1973); see also W.D. Birrell, 'The Stormont-Westminster Relationship', *Parliamentary Affairs*, 26:4 (1973), pp. 471-4

[61] Boyce, *The Irish Question,* p. 96

[62] See J.H. Whyte, 'How much discrimination was there under the Unionist regime?' in T. Gallagher, J. O'Connell (eds.), *Contemporary Irish Studies* (Manchester 1983), pp. 1-35

and a new generation of politicians was neither interested in Northern Ireland nor familiar with Irish affairs.[63]

Only in the years of the Second World War were British ministers reminded of the existence of Northern Ireland, and on this occasion, it helped to increase Stormont's standing at Westminster. The province's willingness to participate in the war effort contrasted positively with the neutrality of the Dublin government. In addition, Northern Ireland's geographical position turned out to be of military significance, as it provided a supply base for the United States and Canada when mainland British ports were cut off. This was recognised in a number of policy documents (see 2.1), and it ultimately led to the Ireland Act (1948) guaranteeing Northern Ireland's constitutional position as part of the United Kingdom as long as Stormont wished. Still, Westminster's active role in the government of Northern Ireland remained so small that some historians manage to tell the history of the province in the 1945 to 1969 period without a single reference to the British government.[64] P. Bew *et al* argue that when Harold Wilson became Prime Minister, in 1964, Northern Ireland had become irrelevant to Westminster, both economically and politically. Accordingly, there was no such thing as a coherent policy with regard to Northern Ireland when the Irish question returned to the centre of British politics in the second half of the 1960s.[65]

The start of what was to become known as the Troubles had not been anticipated by the British government. The initial reaction of the British government was a mixture of disbelief, uncertainty, and – above all – reluctance. Although Wilson had promised a more pro-active policy in relation to Catholic grievances before 1964, he soon returned to the non-interventionist policy of his predecessors.[66] It was agreed that, if anything, the London government would try to work through the Stormont government of Terence O'Neill who was perceived to be a genuine reformer. As one Cabinet member, Richard Crossman, declared: O'Neill was 'the man we were

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[63] See P. Rose, 'Labour', pp. 88-101
[64] J.J. Lee, *Ireland: Politics and Society 1912-1985* (Cambridge 1989), pp. 411-29
[65] P. Bew, P. Gibbon, H. Patterson, *Northern Ireland, 1921-1996: Political Forces and Social Classes* (London 1996), p. 159
[66] See P. Rose, *How the Troubles Came to Northern Ireland* (London, 2000), pp. 11-30

relying on in Northern Ireland to do our job of dragging Ulster out of its eighteenth-century Catholic-Protestant conflict'.[67] The fervent opposition that O'Neill encountered amongst radical Protestants only seemed to confirm this view. Wilson thus described his approach in dealing with Stormont as 'cautious', and indeed, even the reforms the Westminster government pressed for after the violent clashes of October 1968 were too modest to 'have the effect of [either] securing peace or of securing O'Neill's position'.[68] Even though the Home Office was made to draw up detailed contingency plans if London had to assume the direct rule of the province, active intervention was only considered as the very last resort. The principal aim of the British government was, as Home Secretary James Callaghan put it, not 'to get sucked into the Irish bog'.[69] The way in which the British government has attempted to get out of the 'Irish bog' will be the subject of the main part of this work.

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[67] R. Crossman, *The Diaries of a Cabinet Minister, Volume Three* (London 1977), p. 381
[68] M. Cunningham, *British Government Policy in Northern Ireland, 1969-89* (Manchester 1991), p. 19
[69] J. Callaghan, *A House Divided. The Dilemma of Northern Ireland* (London 1973), p. 15

2 The strategic tradition of the British government in Northern Ireland

In the preceding chapter, it was shown that strategy does not operate in the domain of pure rationality, but that it is possible to employ a two-level approach, that is, to assume that in addition to the 'cold calculation' of interest there are also values and ideologies that determine an actor's aims as well as the means it uses to realise its goals (see 1.1). In fact, it is hardly conceivable to talk about the strategy of a particular actor without taking into consideration its core motivational beliefs. As Smith put it: 'If there were no ideologies then presumably there would be no requirement for political change, and consequently, no need for the formulation of any strategies'.[1]

The purpose of this study is to understand British government strategy in Northern Ireland, and to show how and why it has evolved over the 1969-98 period. One would not succeed in achieving this task if we failed to appreciate how the value system of the British government has influenced its strategic decisions. Consequently, the aim of this section is to construct the 'strategic tradition' of the British government in Northern Ireland, that is, to explain its main assumptions and motivational patterns, and to demonstrate how they have translated into so-called policy themes. Of course, it is impossible to determine one singular influence that would explain the strategic tradition of the British government in its entirety. The origins and the history of the British government are intricate, and its ideological development was one of organic growth rather than instantaneous creation. Also, governments are complex actors with many responsibilities and powers in a range of different areas. The only way to assemble a relatively coherent framework of values is therefore to draw boundaries between the different strands of a strategic tradition, thus dividing it into different elements. In order to structure this work, it will be assumed, therefore, that the ideological fault lines are roughly identical to the different policy instruments at Westminster's disposal. They are:

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[1] Smith, *The Role*, p. 52

- the constitutional instrument: the principles that have guided London's views about the province's constitutional status *vis-à-vis* Great Britain and the Republic of Ireland.
- the military instrument: the ideological assumptions that have determined the British government's decisions on how to enforce the rule of law.
- the political instrument: the values that have guided Westminster's views on the distribution of political power within the province.
- the economic instrument: the beliefs that have determined London's decisions in setting the economic and social framework for the province.

Arguably, the boundaries between the different elements of the strategic traditions are largely artificial, and in some cases, it is difficult to assign one idea to one particular instrument. One set of values, for example, may have influenced the use of two or more instruments. Nevertheless, it will be shown that there is a distinct pattern, and that one can speak of a high degree of congruence between motivations and instruments. In any case, the concluding section of this chapter represents an attempt to connect the different lines of thinking.

2.1 The constitutional instrument: Ireland as a place apart

Attempting to conceptualise the British government's constitutional approach to Northern Ireland, Irish Republicans have traditionally employed the colonial paradigm. They claim that Great Britain continues to have some 'selfish' interest in maintaining a presence in Ireland. Even though a small number of Republicans still believe that Britain's supposed interest in Ireland is of an economic nature,[2] the size of the annual subvention to the province seems to have convinced most supporters of the colonial analogy that Britain's interest in Northern Ireland must lie elsewhere. Attention has therefore focused on military or geopolitical considerations. First, with the

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[2] C. Irvine, 'Britain's Strategic and Economic Interests in Ireland', *The Dissenter*, 10 June 2000, http://www.freespeech.org/irwac/Newspaper/Britain_interest_in_Ireland.htm

Republic of Ireland not being a member of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), Northern Ireland represents a key territorial link between Western Europe and North America. Thus, it is maintained, the province remains vital to British security.[3] Second, Republicans have held that the British presence is a safeguard against a revolution in Ireland, which, it is argued, would inevitably occur once the divisive influence of the British Crown had been withdrawn. It follows that the existence of Northern Ireland prevents Ireland from becoming the 'British Cuba', that is, the backdoor from which revolution would spread to Great Britain.[4] Thirdly, according to Republicans, Northern Ireland serves as a 'training ground' for the British Army, where new weapons and tactics are tested and the troops are provided with battlefield experience.[5] To substantiate all these claims, Republicans have provided evidence in the form of a 1949 British Cabinet document that classified Northern Ireland 'as a matter of first-class strategic importance'. It stated that 'it seems unlikely that Britain would ever be able to agree to Northern Ireland leaving His Majesty's jurisdiction... even if the people of Northern Ireland desired it'. Furthermore, a 1951 paper, which originated from the Commonwealth Relations Office, reaffirmed that Ireland was still considered 'a potential base for attack on the United Kingdom', and that 'a part of the island [should therefore]... remain part of the United Kingdom'.[6]

The colonial paradigm is a powerful argument, particularly since British Cabinet members' remarks on Northern Ireland have never been short of references to former British colonies. However, the Republican argument is far from compelling in its original context, namely the history of the British Empire and Westminster's motivations in its dissolution. The 1949 and 1951 documents were drawn up at a time when the British government assumed that it would be possible to hold on to large parts of the Empire. Independence was granted only when the government believed it to be

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[3] M. Burke, *Divide and Rule. Britain's Strategy In Ireland* (Dublin 1993), pp. 13-4
[4] Reed, *Ireland*, p. 384
[5] R. Faligot, *Britain's Military Strategy in Ireland. The Kitson Experiment* (London 1983); see Chapters 2, 3, 5, 6
[6] For both documents, see J. McGarry, B. O'Leary, *Explaining Northern Ireland* (Oxford 1995), pp. 80-1

inevitable, and London was anxious to safeguard the economic and military interests of a Great Power. With Britain's post-war political and economic decline from Empire, the emergence of nationalism in many colonies, and the rise of anti-colonialism at home, this policy became increasingly untenable. Arguably, the failure to regain the control of the Suez Canal in 1956 could be singled out as the one event which signified the end to Britain's imperial aspirations. Westminster realised that 'the world was changing', and that there was nothing to be gained from 'maintaining an imperial position if it involved any expensive struggle'.[7] In the following years, London adopted a pragmatic attitude in relation to its Empire. The transition towards independence had to be smooth, and where Westminster still believed to have some interest, it made sure that 'friendly' governments would take over. Even in what had earlier been classified as 'strategic fortresses' (that is, overseas possessions whose value to Britain would always trump the right of self-determination), the British government eventually agreed to independence if – as in the cases of Cyprus or Kenya – the maintenance of British military bases was guaranteed.[8] Hence, if the colonial logic had applied to Northern Ireland, there would be no reason as to why the British government would not have agreed to let the province go by the time the Troubles had broken out, if only in return for some military bases. As Hugh Rossi, who was a minister at the Northern Ireland Office (NIO) in 1979-81, summed it up: 'From the time of the Spanish Armada down to World War II, Great Britain had a great strategic interest in a strong military presence in Ireland. By the 1960s, the geopolitics of the world had rendered this impractical and unnecessary'.[9]

Contrary to the idea of a 'British Cuba', the Irish appetite for revolution has traditionally been less distinct than Irish Republicans (or members of the rightwing British Monday Club)[10] would have imagined. In the first years of the conflict, members of the British government regarded the Republic of

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[7] T.O. Lloyd, *The British Empire, 1558-1995* (Oxford 1996), p. 339
[8] N. Owen, 'Decolonisation and Postwar Consensus' in H. Jones, M. Kandiah (eds.), *The Myth of Consensus. New Views on British History, 1945-64* (London 1996), p. 169
[9] Hugh Rossi, letter to author, 5 July 2001
[10] See, for example, E. Powell, 'Dirty tricks that link Dublin and Westland', *The Guardian*, 20 January 1986

Ireland as a conservative Catholic theocracy rather than a hotbed for Communist rebellion. Referring to Protestant fears, Stanley Orme (an NIO minister in the mid-1970s) asserted that the Republic was 'a theocratic state bound... to the backward-looking social morality of the pre-Reformation Roman Catholic Church'.[11] With the entry of the Republic of Ireland into the European Economic Communities (EEC) in 1973, the idea that the Irish would be inclined to decide upon a radical change of their political and economic system seemed to have lost any attractiveness to the British government, and instead of being a potential enemy, the Republic was now regarded as a partner on the European stage.[12] When Northern Ireland Secretary Prior once referred to the danger of a Marxist 'British Cuba', this comment was thought to impress the largely Irish American audience, many of whom were supporting the armed struggle of Republicans in Northern Ireland out of nostalgia. The statement did not reflect London's attitude towards the province, nor was it his own view.[13] Further, the claim that Northern Ireland served as a 'training ground' for the British Army ignores the fact that the British defence establishment has traditionally been critical of the Army's deployment to the province. As early as 1970, the Defence Secretary, Lord Carrington, complained that 'the maintenance of the garrison of Northern Ireland at its present level involved heavy expenditure and imposed a serious strain on the Army'.[14] In 1977, MPs were told by a senior MoD official that 'Britain's position in Nato could be jeopardised' if troop levels in Northern Ireland were not reduced.[15] Roland Moyle (an NIO minister in the mid-1970s) put it as follows: 'Our defence people were taking the view that the job of the British army was to defend the North German plain from the Red Army, not chasing around the backstreets of Belfast'.[16]

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[11] S. Orme, 'The View From Dublin', *New Statesman*, 28 July 1972, p. 113. Apparently, this view was shared by Prime Minister Edward Heath; see 'Excerpts from Interview with Prime Minister Heath', *New York Times*, 27 February 1972

[12] See P. Gillepsie, 'From Anglo-Irish to British-Irish relations' in M. Cox, A. Guelke, F. Stephen (eds.), *A Farewell to Arms? From 'Long War' to Long Peace in Northern Ireland* (Manchester 2000), pp. 189-92

[13] See J. Prior, *A Balance of Power* (London 1986), p. 220

[14] Public Record Office (PRO), CAB, 128/47/1, 23 June 1970

[15] 'A switch in line saves time', *The Economist*, 18 June 1977, p. 23

[16] Roland Moyle, interview with author, 7 March 2001

If London had, thus, no apparent interest in Northern Ireland, does it follow that the province was regarded as an integral part of the United Kingdom? Traditionally, British Prime Ministers have been anxious to emphasise that Northern Ireland was – as Prime Minister Thatcher famously remarked – 'part of the United Kingdom as much as my constituency [in Finchley, North London] is'.[17] Below the surface, however, Westminster's attitude towards Northern Ireland has been more ambiguous. To Westminster, the Unionist idea of being British was alien, and at times, it seemed to contradict what it believed to be the very essence of Britishness. London's concept of Britishness entailed the presumed virtues of British political culture, such as fairness, tolerance, moderation, and the rule of law (see 2.3). Unionists, on the other hand, appeared only to appreciate the symbols of Britishness (the Queen, the Union Jack), but not what they stood for. They were regarded as backward bigots who abused their supposed Britishness for selfish reasons, that is, to establish a false sense of superiority over their Nationalist neighbours, and to extract political and financial support from the government at Westminster. Simply put, they were – in the words of Prime Minister Wilson at the height of the Loyalist strike in 1974 – 'people who spend their lives sponging on Westminster and British democracy and then systematically assault democratic methods'.[18] Even Thatcher, who described her instincts as 'profoundly Unionist', believed that the Unionist definition of Britishness was 'too narrow'.[19] There was therefore little emotional attachment that would have resulted from the 'Britishness' of the Unionists, and the pledge to maintain the constitutional status of Northern Ireland as part of the United Kingdom was upheld for reasons that had little to do with a shared sense of national identity. In fact, in the course of more than 30 interviews for this study, not a single NIO minister or senior civil servant expressed any enthusiasm about Northern Ireland's continued membership in the United Kingdom, whilst several privately shared the view of Lord Gowrie (an NIO minister in 1981-83), who once stated that 'if the people of

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[17] Thatcher, quoted in F. Mount, 'Experiences of an Irish PM', *The Spectator*, 14 November 1981, p. 4

[18] Wilson, quoted in D. Anderson, *14 May Days. The Inside Story of the Loyalist Strike of 1974* (Dublin 1994), p. 135

[19] M. Thatcher, *The Downing Street Years* (London 1993), p. 385

Northern Ireland wished to join with the South of Ireland, no British government would resist it for twenty minutes'.[20]

Furthermore, instead of seeing the conflict as one of divided loyalties and overlapping territorial claims, the British government conceptualised the situation as being peculiar to Ireland and the Irish. This attitude sometimes amounted to crude assumptions about the 'Irish character' which was often regarded as passionate, uncivilised, unreasonable, and – in any case – incomprehensible to the English mindset. According to Reginald Maudling, who held responsibility for Northern Ireland under Prime Minister Heath, it was 'very hard for an Englishman to understand the feelings of those who live in Northern Ireland. The history of their struggles is a long one, and they tend to cherish every moment of hatred in it'.[21] Significantly, London's definition of Irishness included Protestants and Catholics alike, both of whom were thought to be engaged in rituals which 'take on an almost Balkan immediacy'.[22] Historical analogy appeared to support the contention that British interventions in Ireland were destined to fail, and that London's efforts – no matter how well-intended – were likely to do more harm than good in an environment that was predominantly characterised by its irrationality. For example, Wilson's Northern Ireland Secretary Rees believed that it was impossible for the '[t]he English disease' to find a solution to the Irish problem.[23] In short, Westminster had convinced itself that the people and the culture of the province were foreign to what it believed to be the British way, and that – if not for a rather unfortunate accident of history – Northern Ireland really belonged to the rest of the island of Ireland. Consequently, the British government believed itself to be an outsider in what was an Irish conflict, and the best it could do was to assist the Irish in bringing about a solution themselves.

Consequently, the option of a withdrawal from Northern Ireland was not a taboo. Indeed, it was seriously considered by both Labour and Conservative

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[20] Gowrie, quoted in P. Bew, G. Gillepsie, *Northern Ireland. A Chronology of the Troubles, 1968-1993* (Dublin 1993), p. 163
[21] R. Maudling, *Memoirs* (London 1978), p. 180
[22] Thatcher, p. 385
[23] Rees, quoted in T. Benn, *Against the Tide. Diaries, 1973-6* (London 1989), p. 457

governments. Yet all the governments during the 1969-98 period have eventually arrived at the same conclusion: that using the constitutional instrument in order to pursue a policy of Irish unity would lead to sectarian strife and civil war, and that the consequences of 'walking out' were 'to leave the Irish to murder one another'.[24] It is not entirely clear what mechanics were anticipated in that case, but London appeared to assume that the withdrawal of British troops would be followed by a 'holocaust',[25] that is, Protestants would attempt to avoid their incorporation into a united Ireland by launching a genocide of the Catholic minority, thus provoking a military intervention of the Republic of Ireland.

Even so, the notion of a full-scale civil war is not a sufficient explanation in itself. After all, British withdrawal from India, Palestine and Cyprus had equally led to civil strife, and London had stuck to its original decision nonetheless. The difference between the former colonies and Northern Ireland, however, was its closeness to Great Britain, and Westminster's constant awareness of the province's proximity resulted in a strengthened sense of responsibility. This link (between closeness and responsibility) could be established through a variety of mechanisms. For example:

- *media scrutiny:* the Northern Ireland conflict received more domestic and international press coverage than any of the emergencies in remote parts of the world. Cabinet members were fully aware that '[e]very action was carried out in the glare of television publicity',[26] and that the government would be held accountable.
- *geography and history,* which has produced strong economic and cultural ties between the two islands, not least in the form of a large Irish community in Great Britain (according to the 1991 census, 830,500 inhabitants of Great Britain were born in either part of Ireland; having at least one Irish parent, almost four million would qualify as Irish citizens).[27] Westminster therefore believed that heightened instability in Northern

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[24] H. Wilson, *Final Term. The Labour Government, 1974-1976* (London 1979), p. 67
[25] Orme; House of Commons (HC), Vol. 871, c. 1578, 4 April 1974
[26] Lord Carrington, Heath's Defence Secretary; P.A.R. Carrington, *Reflect on Things Past* (London 1988), p. 247

Ireland was likely to spill over to the British mainland, and that it was – in Wilson's words – the government's duty 'to prevent the spread of factional violence in Britain itself'.[28] In 1975, Callaghan (then Foreign Secretary) openly referred to the British withdrawal from Cyprus and Palestine, stressing that to act in a similar fashion would place 'the security of Britain as well as Ireland at risk'.[29]

- *common institutions:* Northern Ireland was part of the domestic framework, and its citizens were equal under British law. The military campaign of the Provisional IRA (PIRA) was therefore a direct challenge to the British political system: to ensure that democracy and the rule of law were upheld was a point of principle and a matter of asserting parliamentary democracy. According to Northern Ireland Secretary Patrick Mayhew: 'In this country, we are used to defending democracy and the rule of law. The price is always high, and always worth paying'.[30]

If closeness produced responsibility, it also served to guide London's efforts to keep the province at arm's length. A 'responsible' government would prevent the conflict from disrupting Westminster politics, and from becoming a contentious issue in parliament; it would protect its (mainland) citizens from any conflict-related instability or violence; and it would attempt to limit the extent to which Northern Ireland made the government vulnerable in its dealings with other countries. In essence, a responsible government would try to contain the negative effects of the conflict to Northern Ireland. As a result, the proximity of the province and the sense of responsibility it had induced resulted in two – seemingly contradictory – lines of thinking: there was an incentive to distance Northern Ireland from Great Britain, yet at the same time there was a disincentive to bring this process to its apparently logical conclusion, that is, to withdraw from the province.

Historically, British government thinking about Northern Ireland has translated into three constitutional concepts. The first was the so-called

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[27] See Gillepsie, 'From Anglo-Irish', pp. 189-90
[28] Wilson, *Final Term*, p. 67
[29] Callaghan, quoted in G. Fitzgerald, *All in a Life* (London 1991), p. 271
[30] HC, Vol. 230, c. 490, 22 October 1993

consent principle, which makes the province a *conditional* part of the United Kingdom. It means that Northern Ireland remains within the United Kingdom as long as that is the wish of a majority of its inhabitants (before 1969: a majority of the Stormont parliament). In practice, the same principle would apply to other parts of the United Kingdom too, but only in the case of Northern Ireland has London spelled out explicitly that its attitude in relation to the constitutional status of the province was neutral. As a critic, one could, however, argue that to do so was entirely unnecessary, as it was unlikely that London's reasons for preserving the Union (the 'civil war scenario') would change once there was a majority of one in favour of unification with the Republic. Don Concannon (an NIO minister in the late 1970s) was one of few British politicians who have admitted openly that the consent principle was a 'paper guarantee', and that '[e]veryone knows that the guarantee is not the piece of paper but a million [Protestant] souls who are prepared to get off their backsides and do something about it'.[31] Furthermore, critics have maintained that London's emphasis on majority consent as the only reason for maintaining the Union has not only been inexpedient, but it has in fact led to an exacerbation of the sectarian divide. As J. Ruane and J. Todd explain: 'The communities.. are partially defined by their constitutional preference and each feel trapped... by the fixed constitutional preference of the other... [E]ach finds in the majoritarian guarantee an added reason for maintaining communal solidarity and increasing communal demographic strength'.[32]

The second constitutional theme was devolution. The idea of a regional government appears at odds with the reality of Britain as one of the most centralised states in Europe. Northern Ireland, though, was regarded as a special case, and even the Conservatives – who had strong objections against devolution in Scotland and Wales – have been keen supporters of a Home Rule parliament. In fact, unlike Scotland and Wales, where devolution was seen as a means of undermining the integrity of the United Kingdom, self-government in Northern Ireland was welcomed by many Unionists within the Conservative Party because the motive was thought to be the contrary

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[31] Concannon, quoted in P. O'Malley, *The Uncivil Wars* (Belfast 1983), p. 219
[32] J. Ruane, J. Todd, *The dynamics of conflict in Northern Ireland* (Cambridge 1996), p. 227

from what it was in Scotland and Wales. According to Michael Alison, an NIO minister in 1979-81:

> [I]n Northern Ireland the land neighbour from which it will want increasingly to separate itself will be the Republic [of Ireland]. That is the aim of those who want to promote the Union. So there is nothing dangerous from the point of view of identity and membership of the United Kingdom if Northern Ireland pursues the course that was objectionable in Scotland and Wales.[33]

The underlying reason for Westminster's 'love affair' with devolution in Northern Ireland was that it allowed London to keep the province at maximum distance without raising any questions in relation to its constitutional status as part of the United Kingdom; it appeared to resolve the dilemma which arose from the closeness of the province. When the Home Rule structures were first established in 1920, many Unionists disliked the idea of being separated from the British mainland politically. Yet from London's point of view, the 1920 arrangement turned out to be an enormous success. For almost 50 years, the existence of Stormont guaranteed that the British government was reminded of its unwanted province only when it came to paying the yearly subvention.

The third concept was the inclusion of the Republic of Ireland in the government and/or management of the province. This could happen for a series of practical reasons, such as to facilitate cross-border co-operation in security, to pre-empt Dublin's criticism of the treatment of the minority in Northern Ireland, or to engage the minority community with which the Irish government had formed a special relationship. More fundamentally, however, London believed that Irish matters were best left to the Irish, and that the Dublin government ought to share some of the responsibility for what was believed to be an Irish affair. As Gowrie put it: 'The government of Ireland [that is, Northern Ireland] cannot be done without Dublin'.[34] Accordingly, the so-called 'Irish dimension' was first reflected in the 1920 Council of Ireland which provided for the eventual unification of the two Home Rule areas. Even so, Unionists have rejected the all-Ireland approach, and it has traditionally

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[33] HC, Vol. 979, c. 1616, 29 November 1979

been a sensitive issue to determine to what extent intergovernmental co-operation could be formalised without being interpreted as a 'slippery slope' that would be followed by further concessions to the Nationalist aspiration and, ultimately, lead to the unification of both parts of the island of Ireland. In this regard, Unionist suspicions were bound to be fuelled by London's 'neutrality' with regard to the province's constitutional status as part of the United Kingdom.

2.2 The military instrument: minimum force versus internal conflict

The military tradition of the British government in Northern Ireland can be explained with reference to the postulate of 'minimum force' as well as four political and ideological challenges that have determined the actual 'level of force'. As will be shown, each challenge amounts to a dilemma, and the military tradition of the British government must be understood as a result of those contradictions.

Before describing the four challenges, it is necessary to explain two key concepts, the 'level of force' and the principle of 'minimum force'. Unlike the term 'repression', which is commonly used by leftwing academics in order to pass value judgements about the state's alleged attempts to curtail people's civil liberties, the term 'level of force' attempts to describe the intensity of the overall security effort in an objective manner. As an indicator, it is thought of as an open-ended scale with 'minimum force' at its lower end. Rising 'levels of force' are expressed through one or more of the following elements: the operational intensity of the security forces (for example, number of house searches, helicopter operations, etc.), Army force levels (numerical strength of the security forces), the physical visibility of the military machine (security installations, presence of the military) and the use of emergency legislation.[35] The principle of 'minimum force', on the other hand, derives from British

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[34] Lord Gowrie, interview with author, 13 December 2001

[35] The author's operationalisation of the term 'level of force' follows the British government's own definition of the security effort in Northern Ireland; see 'Liaison Sub-Committee on Confidence Building Measures: Security Issues – Paper by HMG', *Multi-Party Talks*, 23 March 1998

common law which postulates that every member of the security forces is a so-called 'common law constable'. His legal status is equal to any civilian, and the appropriate level of force to be used by the security forces is determined by what is 'reasonable in the circumstances'. This interpretation of the security forces' role has translated into the practice of 'minimum force', which implies the duty to respond to force, yet only with what is absolutely necessary in order to restore law and order.[36]

The first challenge to minimum force relates to the circumstances under which the principle was applied in Northern Ireland. Throughout the Northern Ireland conflict, the idea of 'minimum force' has guided the security forces' efforts. The province was, after all, a part of the United Kingdom, and the domestic standard of minimum force naturally applied to Northern Ireland as much as to any other part of Westminster's jurisdiction. As Maudling put it: '[T]he Army must never use more than the minimum amount of force required... Some people say this is a political doctrine. It is nothing of the sort. It is the law of the land'.[37] However, in contrast to Great Britain, where the state's monopoly on the use of force has been widely accepted and rarely challenged, in Northern Ireland, no consensus with regard to the security forces' activity existed, and the execution of state authority was actively resisted by at least one community at a time. For London, the fact that its authority was defied within its immediate jurisdiction was difficult to rationalise. Whereas the rejection of British authority in remote parts of the Empire could be understood as a logical – if not inevitable – reaction to foreign rule, Northern Ireland citizens were represented at Westminster; they were equal under British law, and all the channels of participation and institutions of government under the Westminster constitution were open to them. They were members of one of the most advanced liberal democracies in the world, and there was no reason to engage in what Callaghan believed to be 'this nonsense on the streets'.[38] Likewise, Prior was keen to stress that Westminster objected not the insurgents' political aims but to the violent

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[36] Mockaitis, *British Counterinsurgency*, p. 27
[37] HC, Vol. 815, cc. 263-4, 6 April 1971
[38] Callaghan, quoted in C. Warman, T. Jones, 'Callahan warning to Ulster agitators', *The Times*, 9 October 1969

means that were employed in order to realise them: '[W]hile the Government are prepared to recognise and accommodate the sense of Irish identity among the minority... they cannot accommodate any identity, whether Unionist or nationalist, expressed through violence or through rejection of the law and the institutions of the country'.[39] From London's point of view, the use of force to pursue political objectives in the United Kingdom was anti-democratic rather than just anti-foreign. It was an attempt to defy the Westminster system of government, and it set a dangerous precedent. As a result, the government's campaign to preserve its authority was a matter of principle, the significance of which went far beyond the question of what national state the province would belong to.

Second, the hybrid nature of the conflict in Northern Ireland necessitated separate types of response. It continues to be a matter of debate as to whether the 'Troubles' are caused by two ethnic groups with mutually exclusive national identities (Unionists versus Nationalists), or whether the conflict originates in the 'foreign occupation' of Ireland (the British government versus the Irish people). Irish Republican thinking is based on the latter, whereas the British government has justified its presence by referring to the former, thus regarding itself as an 'honest broker' between the two sides. In practice, the British government has encountered both types of conflict: civil disorder resulting from sectarian tensions between the two communities, and a campaign of insurgency that was forced upon the British government by PIRA and its demand that Northern Ireland should be united with the rest of the island. London therefore acknowledged that the security forces had to carry out the 'twofold task of maintaining order and preventing communal strife and of eradicating terrorism'.[40] This implied that, on the one hand, the British government needed to deploy the security forces as peacekeepers that would restore law and order and provide a buffer between the 'warring factions'. To perform this function, the security forces had to be accepted as impartial by Catholics and Protestants alike. In Wilson's words, they needed to be 'firm and cool and fair'.[41] Since any use of what could be

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[39] HC, Vol. 63, c. 27, 2 July 1984
[40] PRO, CAB 128/49/16, 22 March 1971
[41] Wilson, quoted in T. Benn, *Office Without Power: Diaries 1968-72* (London 1988), p. 197

perceived as excessive force would have jeopardised the security forces' role as neutral arbiters, this requirement was perfectly coherent with the principle of minimum force. On the other hand, however, the government was engaged in a counterinsurgency campaign. Not only was a substantial proportion of PIRA's activities directed against the government and its agencies, it also inflicted considerable physical and political damage on the civilian population, which meant that the British government had to exercise its constitutional duty of protecting life and property. In addition, London believed that the extent of Loyalist paramilitary violence was largely determined by the intensity of Republican operations, so that containing PIRA was seen as a key to achieving a reduction in the overall level of violence.[42] As a result, Westminster was obliged to respond to PIRA's campaign, even if it disapproved of PIRA's interpretation of the conflict. Further, since PIRA and its supporters were firmly based in the Catholic community, the need to counter PIRA was bound to violate the principle of evenhandedness.[43]

Third, in addition to the level of threat, the level of force was determined by conflicting pressures of the two communities. Contrary to the resolution of conflict in far flung territories of the Empire, where local opinion mattered only up to the point of withdrawal, there was no 'exit strategy' in Northern Ireland. As Prime Minister Major put it: 'The British government... cannot walk away from a part of its own country'.[44] London had convinced itself that the prospect of 'holding' the province with purely military means – that is, if an overwhelming majority of its inhabitants resisted the way in which it was governed – was not desirable; and the possibility of both communities fighting concurrent campaigns against British rule was Westminster's worst nightmare – it would have ignited the civil war scenario the prevention of which the British government saw as its main responsibility towards the

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[42] Mayhew, for example, maintains that 'the Loyalist paramilitaries were just as evil, but they were largely reactive'; Lord Mayhew, interview with author, 7 March 2002

[43] An MoD briefing paper stated that '[f]or the most part, terrorist activity has tended to be concentrated in nationalist areas. This has inevitably meant that the operations of all the security forces... have had a greater impact on the normal life of the minority community'; quoted in C. Ryder, *The Ulster Defence Regiment – an Instrument of Peace?* (London 1991), p. 212

[44] J. Major, *John Major. The Autobiography* (London 1999), p. 492

province (see 2.1).[45] London's favoured 'political solution' – a devolved cross-community settlement – depended on the lasting consent of both communities. The two sides, however, had made the adoption of a particular military approach a condition of their participation in talks, so that the level of force would become a 'bargaining chip' between the government and the two communities. Given that the minority community was more likely to be the subject of attention by the security forces, Nationalist politicians have consistently favoured a more subtle approach, which entailed the abolition of emergency powers and the downscaling of military operations. Unionist leaders, on the other hand, have been anxious to call on London to 'get tough' on PIRA, which included demands for 'shoot-to-kill' operations by the security forces, internment without trial, or the removal of a suspect's right to silence.

Fourthly, the principle of minimum force was challenged by public opinion in Great Britain. Like every government policy in a democratic setting, the British government's actions in Northern Ireland were scrutinised by the wider public, and Westminster was ultimately held accountable by the British electorate. To London, it was obvious that the continued involvement in the province hinged on the British public's acquiescence, and that, therefore, public opinion in Great Britain had to be part of the strategic calculus. For example, as early as February 1971, the Cabinet worried that 'public opinion in Great Britain was beginning actively to resent the situation which was developing in Northern Ireland; and many people would favour abandoning the Province to its fate'.[46] Regarding the level of force, London's dilemma arose from the fact that public opinion on the mainland was highly ambiguous. One section of the electorate appeared to suggest that there was not much point in using any force at all, and that 'the boys' – that is, the British soldiers who were stationed in the province – should be brought back home in order to avoid further casualties in what was believed to be a lost cause. As a result, many opinion polls showed a substantial proportion of those questioned in favour of 'withdrawing the troops immediately'.[47] In

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[45] Wilson, *The Labour Government*, p. 872
[46] PRO, CAB 128/49/9, 9 February 1971
[47] For a collection of opinion polls, see McGarry, *Explaining*, pp. 115-9

addition, liberal and leftwing opinion in Great Britain was highly critical of the security forces' use of emergency powers, the deployment of special forces, and the erosion of civil liberties which was enacted on both sides of the Irish Sea in response to the 'terrorist threat'. Even so, to understand the dynamics of public opinion fully, one has to consider two additional trends. As R. Rose *et al* pointed out as early as 1978, large sections of the British public saw the conflict as 'boring', and most atrocities in Northern Ireland were consequently regarded with indifference; they failed to cause any strong reaction on the British mainland other than reinforcing the cliché that 'the Irish' were unreasonable.[48] Yet, whenever PIRA committed atrocities in England, there emerged an equally strong notion of defiance, that is, that one must not 'give in to terrorists'. When asked what effect PIRA bombs on the mainland had, only 28 per cent of the respondents to a 1984 MORI poll declared that they were more likely to support British withdrawal, whilst a majority (53 per cent) favoured 'tougher action'.[49] Likewise, after the Bishopsgate bomb in April 1993, the Dean of St. Paul's Cathedral declared: 'This great city has faced plague, pestilence, fire and the Blitz. The IRA have no more hope of killing the spirit of London than Adolf Hitler had'.[50] If PIRA was indeed on a par with the pestilence and Hitler, its defeat was a national mission that allowed for extraordinary measures. Thus, in the same way in which the government regarded PIRA as an anti-democratic challenge to the rule of law and the British constitution, a significant section of the British public felt that PIRA had to be put down as a matter of preserving the integrity of the nation.

As a result of British strategic thinking on the use of force, three policy themes have emerged. First, there could be no 'military solution'. In this regard, the contention that the British government perceived the conflict in purely military terms – the so-called 'security mindset'[51] – is clearly mistaken. To coerce the population, or to 'put down' any violent expression of opposition to state authority with military means alone was incompatible with

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[48] R. Rose, I. McAllister, P. Mair, *Is There a Concurring Majority about Northern Ireland?* (Glasgow 1978), p. 25
[49] G. Brock, 'For Prior's heir, an even harder task', *The Times*, 23 August 1984
[50] 'This great city...', *Daily Mirror*, 26 April 1993
[51] A. McIntyre, 'Modern Irish Republicanism: The Product of British State Strategies', *Irish Political Studies*, 10:1 (1995), p. 98

the principle of minimum force, and it contradicted the government's self-declared role of a 'third party' to mediate between the warring factions. Most fundamentally, it was regarded as counterproductive. Since there was no 'exit strategy', any lasting solution had to be 'political', that is, an agreed settlement that would be brought about 'by proper parliamentary, constitutional and electoral processes, [because] this is the British way of doing things'.[52] Even so, London clearly believed that the impact of violence was disruptive and destabilising. To achieve the pacification of the province, it was therefore necessary to use the military instrument in order to reduce the level of violence to 'an acceptable level',[53] namely one which allowed the primacy of constitutional politics to be re-established. This consensus, however, was weakened by Westminster's tendency to remove itself from the execution of the military instrument, which meant that the government exercised less political control of the security forces than necessary. In this regard, there was an inclincation to 'outsource' controversial security decisions, that is, to delegate decisions from Cabinet or ministerial level to other actors or institutions who were thought to judge a particular question on a purely technocratic basis. By doing so, the government avoided responsibility, it distanced itself from events in the province and protected itself from accusations of partisanship. At the same time, the logic of outsourcing increased the tendency to regard security matters in an isolated manner, and it hampered the use of the military instrument as a means of bargaining.

The second theme was the maintenance of civilian government and the preservation of basic principles of British justice in order to allow for what John Cope (an NIO minister in 1989-90) believed to be 'as normal a legal process as possible'.[54] Challenging this idea, C. Townshend has argued in favour of a 'third way' between peacetime government and martial law, which would have allowed for the application of strong military measures whilst

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[52] Northern Ireland Secretary Francis Pym; HC, Vol. 866, c. 670, 13 December 1973
[53] Maudling, quoted in J. Chartres, 'Home Secretary says IRA may never be totally eliminated', *The Times*, 16 December 1971
[54] Lord Cope, interview with author, 5 March 2002

maintaining some form of civilian government.[55] Other authors, and some Unionist politicans, have suggested the introduction of martial law, thus freeing the security forces from all contraints.[56] None of these arguments reflect that the preservation of democratic procedures was essential to the government's justification of its involvement in Northern Ireland. From London's point of view, it was a case of providing evidence that British institutions and the rule of law – with an independent judiciary, public trial in an open court, representation by a lawyer, and the automatic right of appeal – were superior to the 'kangaroo courts' of its enemies, and that the 'terrorists' were engaged in criminal activities rather than pursuing a legitimate cause. Simply put, there was no point in embarking on a mission to assert the authority of constitutional government if its defence involved the abolition of what one wanted to preserve. Northern Ireland Secretary Peter Brooke put this point very strongly:

> [O]ur response to terrorism must be conducted within the framework of the rule of law. It is, quite simply, because our adherence to the rule of law, in the face of the most atrocious provocation, as well as to democratic procedures and the principles of justice that sustain our civilisation, demonstrates why terorrism should not win and why it cannot win. For terrorism, by its very nature, represents a relapse into barbarism and savagery that unites the entrie civilised world in determined and unquenchable opposition.[57]

One may argue that this approach was bound to result in some degree of self-deception, as some civil liberties needed to be curtailed in order to meet the requirements of the security forces. In fact, to determine the degree to which the principles and the ordinary processes of the rule of law could be foregone in the name of effective counterinsurgency would be one of London's main dilemmas in formulating a coherent military strategy.

The third theme was the gradual replacement of troops from Great Britain with local forces, that is, the 'Ulsterisation' of the conflict. This idea cannot be ascribed to a singular influence. On the one hand, it reflected the

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[55] C. Townshend, *Britain's Civil Wars. Counterinsurgency in the Twentieth Century* (London 1986), p. 22

[56] See, for example, P. Johnson, 'Ending fear of the IRA', *The Spectator*, 2 April 1988, p. 22

government's alienation from the province, the belief that Irish problems are best left to the Irish, and the conviction that the British – whether soldiers or politicians – could do no good on Irish soil (see 2.1). At the same time, though, it was a means of escaping the political challenges that have shaped British government thinking in relation to the use of the military instrument. Even if Ulsterisation was not necessarily a solution to Westminster's military dilemmas, having local forces to perform in a difficult environment was in any case preferable to the use of troops from Great Britain. It appeared to make London's engagement more sustainable in the long term, particularly with regard to public opinion in Great Britain and the need to fulfil other commitments elsewhere (see 2.1). When Ulsterisation allowed for a greater role of the police, it also helped to reinforce the notion of PIRA as an anti-constitutional challenge to civilian government. However, given that the security forces in Northern Ireland were predominantly recruited from the Protestant community, law enforcement was likely to be seen as one-sided, and it increased the possibility of low-level collusion between members of the security forces and paramilitary organisations. Still, the British government was largely indifferent to the sectarian dynamics, mainly because there was a strong belief that the professionalisation of the RUC and the impartial ethos of the British Army would make the sectarian composition of the security forces irrelevant.

2.3 The political instrument: British political culture in a divided society

British government thinking *vis-à-vis* the distribution of power within Northern Ireland was shaped by the tenets of British political culture, in particular 'the emotional and attitudinal environment within which .. [the British] political system operates'.[58] The substance of both the Westminster constitution and British political culture can be found in their approach towards resolving conflict. The Westminster system, with its lively and controversial debates at the House of Commons, appears adversarial, yet in almost dialectic fashion,

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[57] HC, Vol. 181, c. 24, 19 November 1990
[58] D. Kavanagh, *Political Culture* (London 1972), p. 10

the underlying principle of conflict resolution in British political culture is the search for co-operation and compromise, the quest for 'give and take'. At the end of every process of discussion and mutual persuasion, it seems, all the participants get together, hammer out their differences and find a solution that respects the integrity of everyone involved, even if that compromise fulfils everyone's aspirations only to a certain extent. British political culture is, therefore, pragmatic rather than dogmatic, and the use of violence for political purposes is outside its bounds. Further, the British constitution is the result of centuries of piecemal change, starting with the Magna Carta in 1215 and interrupted only by the English Civil War in the 17th century. Unlike many other liberal democracies, where the change from aristocracy to democracy had been abrupt, the term 'revolution' is alien to the British political tradition. In Britain, political challenges have been absorbed by a constitutional apparatus that is based on a system of tacit understandings rather than a rigid code, and that has therefore proved flexible enough to adapt to change whilst preserving its symbols and institutions. In P. Norton's words, the British constitution is a 'living organism in a condition of perpetual growth'.[59]

The practical reason as to why the different political actors have traditionally been willing to compromise is the fact that a majority of the electorate has continually described itself as 'moderate'. For any political party, this means that it has to reach out beyond its core supporters and appeal to the political centre if it wants to win a majority and political power.[60] The controversy that precedes the eventual compromise is seen as part of the 'political game' – as competition rather than confrontation – and it helps to map out the main planks of an agreement. Accordingly, former Prime Minister Lord Balfour declared in 1927 that '[o]ur whole political machinery presupposes a people so fundamentally at one that they can safely afford to bicker; and so sure of their own moderation that they are not dangerously disturbed by the never-ending din of political conflict'.[61] Equally important, there has been a high degree of consent between governors and governed in relation to the way in

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[59] P. Norton, *The British Polity* (London 1984), p. 49
[60] D. Dutton, *British Politics Since 1945. The Rise and Fall of Consensus* (Oxford 1991), pp. 6-7
[61] Lord Balfour (Arthur Balfour), quoted in D. Kavanagh, P. Morris, *Consensus Politics. From Attlee to Major* (Oxford 1989), p. 16

which political power was exercised through the mechanisms of the existing political system. The extent to which political culture and institutions in Great Britain are linked even led some observers to conclude that 'the crown; the flag; the rule of law ...and parliamentary democracy' embody the essence of what one refers to when speaking about 'Britishness'.[62] Despite its elitist orientation and the dominance of what some might claim to be 'English norms', Westminster has therefore enjoyed a high degree of legitimacy amongst the electorate.

It is not difficult to identify the principal tenets of British political culture in London's thinking about how to bring about a political solution of the Northern Ireland conflict. In fact, the government's political ideas were firmly based on the British ideal, and even though London gradually recognised that the reality of the Northern Ireland situation was different from Great Britain, it thought of British political norms as something that people in Northern Ireland had to be educated towards. The most significant British idea was that of a 'moderate centre' which had to be mobilised against the 'men of violence' who were, regardless of their motives, the 'enemies of law abiding citizens everywhere'.[63] Heath declared that 'find[ing] a lasting political settlement which would unite moderate opinion across the religious divide' was the underlying motive of all his government's actions in Northern Ireland.[64] The notion of a 'moderate centre' rested on the assumption that the vast majority of the province's inhabitants were 'peaceloving' and 'decent' people who wanted to pursue their jobs and lead a happy life, no matter what religious denomination they belonged to. At the fringes of society, however, there were small groups of dangerous criminals who exploited old antagonisms for their own ends. In London's view, Northern Ireland society consisted of the 'bad' – that is, those who committed, approved of, or stirred up violence – and the 'good', that is, the moderates who condemned violence, and who were prepared to work together to uphold the rule of law. In a passionate plea at the House of Commons, Callaghan declared:

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[62] 'One Nation', *The Spectator*, 9 December 2000, p. 7
[63] Thatcher, quoted in 'Thatcher speech in Ulster', *The Times*, 29 May 1981
[64] E. Heath, *The Course of My Life* (London 1998), p. 420

> There may be 250 or 500 men in Northern Ireland today who are intent on dragging the country down so that it lives under the shadow of the gun. The question is not... what those few hundred will do, but what the rest of the people... will do. Will they allow themselves to live under the shadow of the gunman and permit themselves to be divided... into two groups, separated by a mile of misunderstanding?[65]

Thus, in a remarkable similarity to Irish Republican ideology, the British government thought the sectarian divide to be imagined rather than real. In contrast to the Republicans, however, who made 'British Imperialism' responsible for the division of society, London believed that it was the result of the work of 'demagogues' and 'terrorists'.

In London's view, the solution was simple. In truly British fashion, the protagonists of moderate opinion from both sides had to sit around a table, clear up misperceptions, iron out their differences, and then develop a positive vision for the future of their country, which – from London's perspective – appeared to be based on the absence of violence, co-operation and economic prosperity (see 2.4). Consequently, the constitutional question was regarded as a matter of lesser importance: 'The real issue of politics in Northern Ireland is how, within the existing boundaries, two communities can live together. That is what really matters'.[66] It followed that the British government was an 'outsider' whose only interest was 'to try and bring about peace. To try and stop the violence in any way we could'.[67] In that sense, London assumed its 'moderate' allies from both sides of the sectarian divide to treat each other with fairness and respect: they were men of goodwill who had a common interest in building a powerful alliance against the enemies of society and constitutional government. The 'men of violence', on the other hand, had no constructive role to play. On the contrary, the purpose of bringing the 'moderates' together was to defeat the extremist elements that prevented Northern Ireland from becoming a 'normal' society.

Still, the extremists were not seen as a static group. London assumed that the 'men of violence' could turn into 'doves', and thus convert to the

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[65] HC, Vol. 799, c. 321, 7 April 1970
[66] Maudling; HC, Vol. 827, c. 41, 29 November 1971

'moderate centre'. The term 'doves' was therefore believed to describe a stage in the evolution of a paramilitary organisation at which a significant section within that organisation was thought to be willing to give up violence in favour of constitutional means.[68] Even so, London's attitude towards the 'doves' was as conflicting and ambiguous as its attitude towards Northern Ireland generally.[69] On the one hand, the British government believed that the divisive and destabilising influence of violence was at the heart of the conflict (see above), and it followed that any conversion towards peaceful politics had to be encouraged. Moreover, as a lesson from its colonial past, the British government believed that one had to react with pragmatism once the paramilitaries seemed to be willing to compromise. Heath, for example, stated that the British government had never had any reservations about negotiating with the 'rebel leaders' if doing so helped 'to put an end to terrorism and establish a peaceful regime'.[70] On the other hand, Northern Ireland was part of the domestic realm, and if London wanted to retain the integrity of its institutions, and maintain the credibility of the democratic process, it needed to demonstrate that extremists would 'not be allowed to bomb [their] way to the conference table',[71] that those who used violence were criminals, and that the 'true' moderates must not be betrayed by compromising with the 'men of violence'.[72]

British government thinking *vis-à-vis* the political instrument has translated into two themes. The first was the notion of the British government as an 'honest broker' between the two sides. Since London thought of itself as an outsider who had no stake in the inter-communal power struggle except the desire for peace and reconciliation, it believed itself in a perfect position to play the role of a mediator between the conflicting aspirations of the two communities. Accordingly, the British government would make sustained

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[67] Lord Prior (James Prior), interview with author, 27 November 2001

[68] Peter Mandelson, who became Northern Ireland Secretary in 1999, believed that 'we have to make [the distinction] between those terrorists who have political objectives and are prepared to negotiate those objectives ... I don't call them terrorists when they reach that stage. They are resisters. They are freedom-fighters... And it's what stage of development they're at, what attitude they have to politics, whether they're prepared to engage'; Mandelson, quoted in 'The Year the World Changed', *Channel 4*, 29 December 2001

[69] See P. Neumann, 'Freedom-fighters, not quitters', *Fortnight*, February 2002, p. 15

[70] Heath, p. 438

[71] Wilson, quoted in R. Fisk, 'New security steps discussed', *The Times*, 19 April 1974

efforts to balance both sides' interests, and help them to tease out the 'middle ground' where agreement could be found. London's claim to be a disinterested outsider, however, was difficult to accept by the two sides. Nationalists found it hard to regard an actor as neutral which, from the point of view of Irish Nationalism, was the major obstacle to Irish unity, and whose symbols were regarded as alien, exclusive and oppressive. Unionists objected to the structural asymmetry of London's role that allowed for the close political co-ordination with Dublin and 'secret talks' with the representatives of paramilitary groups, but that made it impossible for Westminster to side with their self-declared allies, the Unionists.[73]

The second theme was the idea of a cross-community settlement to which both communities would consent, and that would thus produce political stability. Whilst any modification of majority rule was remarkably un-British in that it meant the virtual abolition of the adversarial Westminster model, the British government recognised that '[s]imple majority rule... would leave the minority in perpetual opposition',[74] which implied that Nationalists had to be given a permanent role in the political system for democratic government to be effective and stability to emerge. In fact, the British government saw any form of co-operative government as a means of *overcoming* the sectarian status quo; it was a temporary 'bridging operation' until 'normal' politics would be established.[75] In the meantime, London hoped, the 'men of goodwill' from both sides would work together in order to strengthen the 'moderate centre' and defeat the 'men of violence'. Even so, the practical difficulties with this approach were numerous. Most significantly, the requirement of mutual consent meant that both sides – Unionists as well as Nationalists – were at liberty to veto the terms of any settlement. Had Westminster's assumptions about the 'moderate centre' been accurate, this would not have posed a problem. In reality, though, the pattern of inter-party competition in Northern Ireland suggests that the two main 'moderate' parties, the Ulster Unionist Party (UUP) and the (mainly Catholic) Social Democratic and Labour Party

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[72] Mayhew; HC, Vol. 230, c. 587, 25 October 1993
[73] A. Aughey, *Under Siege. Ulster Unionism and the Anglo-Irish Agreement* (London 1989), pp. 39-40
[74] Northern Ireland Secretary Douglas Hurd; HC, Vol. 81, cc. 970-1, 26 June 1985
[75] Orme; HC, Vol. 874, c. 1182, 4 June 1974

(SDLP), need to reach out to the fringes of their respective blocs in order to broaden their appeal.[76] As a consequence, there is no natural inclination to move towards the centre, as in Great Britain, and the traditional values of British political culture – moderation and compromise – are therefore of questionable value. Moreover, London's idea of a cross-community settlement ignored the cause of the division it wanted to heal. With the notable exception of the bi-confessional Alliance party, all the major parties in Northern Ireland can be defined with reference to the constitutional issue, and the political actors in the province consequently see each other primarily in terms of their respective stance on the constitutional question.[77] Whilst the British government anticipated that the constitutional issue would wither away once the parties of the 'moderate centre' had started to co-operate, the overriding importance of the constitutional question to both elites and society at large suggests that any attempt at power-sharing would be overshadowed by the incompatibility of each side's ultimate aspiration. Incidentally, the absence of any national consensus was the main reason why A. Lijphart (who had created the concept of a consociational democracy) believed the conditions for co-operative government in Northern Ireland to be 'overwhelmingly unfavorable'.[78]

2.4 The economic instrument: peace through prosperity

To develop the notion of a British tradition in using the economic instrument, it is necessary to review the fundamental assumptions on which British economic policy in the post-war period rested. Amongst historians, it is almost universally agreed that the Second World War gave rise to a new consensus on economic policy, the most prominent concepts of which were

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[76] P. Rose, *Northern Ireland. A Time of Choice* (London 1976), pp. 107-10, 167-72

[77] Research shows that if Northern Ireland voters switch party political allegiances, they tend to do so in favour of another party within the same bloc, that is, either Unionist or Nationalist; significant movements between the blocs are extremely rare. Even if British political parties organised in Northern Ireland, voters would continue to let their decision be determined by the perceived stance on the constitutional issue, with Catholics voting Labour and Protestants in favour of the supposedly pro-Union Conservatives; see McGarry, 'Explaining', p. 134

[78] A. Lijphart, *Democracy in Plural Societies. A Comparative Exploration* (New Haven 1977), pp. 134-41

the Welfare State and the 'managed economy'. At the end of the war, most Britons came to believe that the state had a significant role to play in the process of reconstruction, and many soldiers – who had served their nation on the battlefields of Europe – looked upon the state to provide them with the means for a new beginning. This mood had set in once victory was assumed to be certain, and arguably, it contributed to Labour's election victory in 1945.[79] The 1942 Beveridge Report (on 'Social Insurances and Allied Services') set out the agenda for the years to come. It declared the defeat of the 'giants' of 'Want, Disease, Ignorance, Squalor, and Idleness' as its aims, and it resulted – most prominently – in a system of social insurance that would cover every citizen, as Churchill put it, 'from cradle to grave'.[80] It replaced the notion of charity and Poor Law with the idea of 'social citizenship', so that people would be entitled to certain benefits rather than rely on the generosity of others, or the 'moral discretion' of the state.[81] The new spirit ran contrary to the ideas of *laisser faire* which many had made responsible for the economic and political catastrophes of the 1920s and 1930s. At the end of the war, the tenets of Keynesian economic management had therefore become the accepted orthodoxy. Keynes' economic philosophy justified the state's right of intervention in the markets, the idea of increased state spending as a means to counter recessionary tendencies, and the maintenance of a large public sector. In doing so, the government's objective was to ensure prosperity and – most significantly – full employment. This was 'good economics' as well as 'good politics', but politicians at the time also stressed the 'human benefits of being engaged in productive employment', and Beveridge pointed to the fact that meaningful employment was 'a provision for human happiness'.[82] Equally important was the provision of public or publicly funded housing. As in the cases of social security and unemployment, the immediate need for government action arose from wartime destruction, yet at the same time it was regarded as a means for building a better society by 'removing the slums' (particularly in Northern England and Scotland), and providing every community with a 'decent'

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[79] D. Gladstone, *The twentieth-century welfare state* (London 1999), pp. 40-2
[80] Churchill, quoted in J. Harris, '"Contract" and "Citizenship" in D. Marquand, A. Seldon (eds.), *The Ideas that Shaped Post-War Britain* (London 1996), p. 122
[81] Ibid.
[82] Beveridge, quoted in Kavanagh, *Consensus*, p. 36

standard of housing was seen as a precondition for social peace and individual self-fulfilment.[83]

On the fundamental motivations, aims and objectives of economic policy, both Conservatives and Labour largely agreed; points of disagreement concerned questions of implementation rather than matters of principle. The Conservatives continued along the lines of the Labour government when they took over power in 1951, and the post-war consensus essentially remained intact until Thatcher became Prime Minister (in 1979). The reason as to why the Welfare State and the 'managed economy' survived several changes in government can be found in its ideological outlook. It was social democratic rather than socialist, and in that sense it united the pragmatic wing of the Labour Party with the mainstream of 'One Nation' Conservatism. The doctrinaire socialists within Labour, on the other hand, despised the economic consensus as 'an inadequate bandage for the wounds inflicted on the poor by capitalism'.[84] Labour's Tony Benn and other leftwingers criticised the concept of the Welfare State for ignoring the question of inequality, and for failing to make the state an instrument in redistributing material wealth from the rich to the poor. In his analysis of the post-war reforms, S. Pollard confirmed:

> The major redistribution achieved by the social services was horizontal, e.g. from single and healthy men to large families, the sick, and the aged, and this aspect of it met with widespread approval, for, after all, the net contributor and the net beneficiary was commonly the same person at different stages of his career.[85]

Understanding the Welfare State as a means of creating an 'equal society' would be a serious misperception. Its aim was to eradicate poverty, and to make the provision of public services more efficient. When in government, neither Conservatives nor Labour showed great willingness to upset the general consensus by engaging in redistributive policies that would have questioned the nation's social fabric. As A. Sked concluded: The 'whole ethos

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[83] B. Coxall, L. Robins, *British Politics since the War* (London 1998), p. 53
[84] Kavanagh, *Consensus*, p. 80
[85] S. Pollard, *The Development of the British Economy*, 3rd edition (London 1983), p. 271

[of the Welfare State] has been one designed to support rather than to undermine the social system'.[86]

London's thinking in relation to the economic situation in Northern Ireland was remarkably similar to the postulates that had shaped the post-war consensus in Great Britain. The premise of London's economic policy in Northern Ireland was the assumption that there was a link between peace and prosperity. In London's view, both the disharmony between the two communities and the seemingly irrational significance that Protestants and Catholics had attached to the constitutional question related to the fact that – compared to the rest of the United Kingdom – living standards in Northern Ireland were low and unemployment was high. Accordingly, Callaghan told his Cabinet colleagues: 'If even 1,500 jobs could be created in Londonderry, this would go a long way towards transforming the political situation'.[87] In a similar vein, Mayhew once quoted his predecessor at the time of the Great War, Augustine Birrell, who 'once wistfully reflected that, if he could only get the jobs, most of his other Irish problems would subside'.[88] Hence, whilst the military instrument had to contain violence, the instrument of economic policy was meant to deal with the material part of this equation. As Maudling declared: 'There is a vicious circle here. More trouble on the streets... means less investment in the economy.... and less employment means the opportunity of and the temptation to commit further violence'.[89]

Since the basic analysis was essentially the same, it followed that the ideas on how to remove the economic causes of the conflict were similar to those which had been prevalent in the post-war period of reconstruction. As Prior stated: 'Thatcherism didn't exist in Northern Ireland... It was the one part of the United Kingdom where Keynesianism was still rampant'.[90] The main economic tools in resolving the political *malaise* of Northern Ireland would therefore include the provision of additional employment, the creation of social and leisure facilities, and housing. Of course, this set of priorities

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[86] A. Sked, *Britain's Decline. Problems and Perspectives* (Oxford 1987), p. 76
[87] PRO, CAB 128/44/42, 4 September 1969
[88] HC, Vol. 230, c. 483, 22 October 1993
[89] HC, Vol. 815, c. 260, 6 April 1971
[90] Lord Prior, interview with author, 27 November 2001

necessitated massive financial support. Westminster was fully aware of the financial burden Northern Ireland would continue to represent, but it decided not to let this implication determine its use of the economic instrument. Peter Viggers (the NIO's minister for industry in 1985-89) now admits that 'I was embarrassed by the size of my departmental budget... I had a huge budget, and I was not inhibited in any way by money. I was urging a harsh, tough business-like line, but I was almost on my own in that'.[91]

Like the post-war consensus, British thinking in relation to the economic situation in Northern Ireland was reluctant to address the issue of economic inequality. Whereas in Great Britain inequality was largely defined in terms of the class cleavage, people in Northern Ireland conceptualised inequality predominantly in terms of the sectarian divide. Throughout the 1969-98 period, the relative deprivation between Catholics and Protestants with regard to every economic and social indicator (such as unemployment, income, living standards, etc.) remained highly significant with Protestants in a more favourable position overall.[92] Even if the argument about whether direct and/or indirect discrimination has been the primary cause for this differential is continuing,[93] there can be no doubt that the result – namely the difference between the two communities in terms of economic status – has been a persistent grievance which contributed to the sense of political injustice, disadvantage and alienation felt by many members of the Catholic community in Northern Ireland.[94] On behalf of the British government, however, there was a clear sense of unease when it came to formulating economic policies that were geared towards advancing the opportunities and rights of groups rather than individuals. One approach to relative deprivation was, therefore, to ignore the evidence, and to refuse to admit that there was a problem. Callaghan, for example, believed that '[c]omplaints about

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[91] Peter Viggers, interview with author, 28 November 2001

[92] See M. Melaugh, 'Majority-Minority Differentials: Unemployment, Housing and Health' in S. Dunn (ed.), *Facets of the Conflict in Northern Ireland* (London 1995), pp. 131-48

[93] For examples of the opposing views, see P.A. Compton, 'Employment Differentials in Northern Ireland and Job Discrimination: A Critique' in P.J. Roche, B. Barton, *The Northern Ireland Question: Myth and Reality* (Aldershot 1991), pp. 40-76; D. Smith, G. Chambers, *Inequality in Northern Ireland* (Oxford 1991)

[94] See D. Smith, G. Chambers, *Equality and Inequality in Northern Ireland: Perceptions and Views* (London1987)

employment are heard just as much among the majority'.[95] Westminster clearly hoped that the keenly anticipated outbreak of prosperity would gradually level out the differences between Catholics and Protestants, and that the issue would consequently go away without the need for London to intervene pro-actively. The first Northern Ireland Secretary, Whitelaw, stated that his aim was to 'work towards measures that benefit Northern Ireland as a whole rather than favouring one community or another',[96] thus regarding the issue of economic equality as a zero-sum situation in which gains for one community were only possible at the expense of the other.

London's tradition in using the economic instrument translated into two policy themes. The first was the need to engage in resolute state action to create employment, even if it increased the financial burden to the Treasury. As defeating unemployment was believed to be a necessary pre-condition for the resolution of the conflict, the British government would not have any ideological reservations about providing the necessary funds to create additional employment in the public sector. Furthermore, Westminster would engage in vigorous attempts to secure investment from abroad as well as continue to support existing ventures. 'Throwing money at the province', however, did little to address the question of inequality, and – as many authors have pointed out – this approach transformed Northern Ireland into a 'workhouse' economy where dying industries were kept alive by the state and large amounts of public money were given to 'branch plants' that were susceptible to closure in times of recession.[97]

Second, the British government was reluctant to implement policies that would challenge the economic and social status quo between the two communities. Concepts like 'affirmative action' (any active effort to improve employment or educational opportunities for any one minority or marginalised

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[95] HC, Vol. 788, c. 59, 13 October 1969
[96] HC, Vol. 841, c. 1329, 24 July 1972
[97] See P. Teague, 'Multinational Companies in the Northern Ireland Economy: An Outmoded Model of Industrial Development?' in P. Teague (ed.), *Beyond the Rhetoric. Politics, the Economy and Social Policy in Northern Ireland* (London 1987), pp.160-82

group) or 'preferential treatment' ('positive discrimination' or quota systems)[98] remained alien to the British tradition of using the economic instrument. Basing its policies on individual safeguards against direct discrimination, London ignored the fact that the existing imbalance in economic opportunities was not merely a result of overt discrimination, and that – as P.A. Compton points out – 'in the deeply divided society of Northern Ireland.. the "rights" of the community may rival those of the inidividual in political importance'.[99] Somewhat paradoxically, the British government accepted that the *political* situation in Northern Ireland necessitated the alteration of simple majority rule (see 2.3), yet it refused to recognise the sectarian logic in relation to the *economic* situation. As a consequence, London's approach would largely fail to impact upon the perception and/or reality of sectarianism in the Northern Ireland economy.

2.5 Conclusion

The aim of this chapter has been to outline the main ideas that have guided British strategic thinking in relation to Northern Ireland. It has been shown where these values originated from, how they have translated into British government approaches towards Northern Ireland, and what policy themes can be associated with them. Moreover, attention has been drawn to the inherent contradictions of the concepts and policy themes which the British government has derived from its ideological assumptions.

Again, it needs to be emphasised that the boundaries between the different elements of the strategic tradition of the British government are largely artificial. In some cases, a similar idea might have influenced the use of different instruments. Devolution, for example, was the constitutional equivalent of Ulsterisation. Both themes can be traced back to the same attitude: that the British government thought of Northern Ireland as an alien

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[98] For an exploration of the different concepts associated with affirmative action and preferential treatment, see J. Edwards, *Affirmative Action in a Sectarian Society: Fair Employment Policy in Northern Ireland* (Aldershot 1995), pp. 18-26

[99] Compton, p. 71

place that could not be understood by 'Englishmen', and that therefore its involvement in the province – whether politically or militarily – had to be minimised. In a similar vein, the idea of Westminster as a 'neutral arbiter' in an intercommunal conflict can be found as an influence in deploying the security forces, in its self-declared role as a political mediator and 'honest broker' between the two communities, and as an explanation for failing to address the issue of relative inequality in the area of social and economic policy.

The division of the strategic tradition into different elements has also made some contradictions in British government thinking obvious. Most fundamentally, this can be seen in the employment of the military instrument, which can only be understood as a result of the contradictions that have resulted from a series of political and ideological challenges. Yet contradictions can also be found between the different elements of the strategic tradition. For example, whereas London's ideas about 'Ireland as a place apart' dictated that the constitutional instrument had to be used in order to keep Northern Ireland at maximum distance to the British mainland because the Irish were seen as 'irrational', Westminster's political calculus assumed that the tenets of British political culture were transferable to the province. Likewise, the British government accepted that the sectarian dynamics in Northern Ireland would determine the access to political power, but it was not prepared to apply the same line of thinking to the economic instrument. Most fundamentally, perhaps, the British government fuelled constitutional ambiguity and instability by making Northern Ireland a conditional part of the United Kingdom, yet politically, London sought to introduce a system of government that required trust and stability for both sides to be willing to share power.

Further, the description of the different elements of the strategic tradition shows that there was little in British government thinking on Northern Ireland that would merit the term 'grand design'. On the contrary, it was eclectic in that it assembled a number of ideological strands from different sources in order to suit the perceived circumstances, and – with the possible exception

of the economic instrument – it rarely looked beyond the short or medium term. It can therefore be described as 'managerial', that is, pragmatic within the existing ideological and constitutional parameters. Despite the obvious importance of the constitutional question to the nature of the conflict, and even though Westminster thought of Northern Ireland as a natural constituent of Ireland rather than an integral part of the United Kingdom, there was no strong inclination to take up the constitutional issue, or to formulate a clear ideological preference on whether the province should belong to a united Ireland or remain with the United Kingdom. In relation to the 'big questions', the attitude of the British government was largely agnostic, and the formulation of strategy was therefore susceptible to the immediate impact of events 'on the ground'. As Rees put it: '[I]t is wrong to look at the many problems in Northern Ireland as if there were some ready-made textbook solution. What the government will do is to respond positively to a developing situation'.[100] This approach allowed for flexibility, yet it could equally result in a lack of overall consistency and perpetual empiricism. As O'Malley once pointed out: 'None of the parties to the conflict trusts Britain, and with good cause. Because she will not declare herself, no one knows where she stands'.[101]

The value system that has been outlined in this chapter is not static, that is to say, it does not apply to every period of British government involvement in Northern Ireland in the same way. It will therefore be of interest to find out how stringent certain ideas were implemented in particular periods of London's engagement, and why some assumptions featured less prominently in the formulation of British government strategy than others. Even the most superficial observer of British government policy in Northern Ireland will realise that there were hierarchies of values, that Westminster set priorities, and that it sometimes consciously decided to let one ideological strand – or one particular instrument – dominate the others at different times. In fact, finding out how and in what way British strategic thought in relation to Northern Ireland has evolved in the course of the 1969-98 period is the main

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[100] M. Rees, *Northern Ireland. A personal perspective* (London 1985), p. 221
[101] O'Malley, *The uncivil*, p. 254

purpose of this study, and it will be pursued in the following chapters of this work.

3 Avoiding responsibility? London on the defensive, 1969-72

The years 1969-72 represented a period of rapid change. In August 1969, London agreed to deploy the British Army to Northern Ireland. This event is widely seen as the first significant intervention of the British government in the Northern Ireland conflict. Within two and a half years, the troops themselves had become the targets, and Westminster thought it necessary to abolish the structures of self-government and assume the direct rule of Northern Ireland.

In this chapter, it is argued that London's overriding interest in 1969 was to terminate its involvement in the province as quickly as possible. Therefore, maintaining the devolved structures at Stormont in its existing form became the objective of London's strategy, and all the instruments at its disposal had to be employed in a way to fulfil this purpose. As will be shown, Westminster's strategy was based on a profound misunderstanding of the political dynamics in the province, so that the effects of using the strategic instrument as a means of restoring the status quo ante were highly adverse. London's strategy created conditions that were susceptible to the re-emergence of the Irish national question and the rise of an insurgent challenge in the form of PIRA. With the SDLP's withdrawal from Stormont and the failure of internment without trial in August 1971, the British government decided to re-evaluate its strategy. Like the 1969 framework, Westminster's new strategy was guided by the overall aim of re-insulating Northern Ireland from Great Britain. Even so, the new approach recognised some of the political dynamics the British government had ignored in 1969; it led to a *rapprochement* between London and Dublin; and it resulted in a significant overhaul of the military response to the conflict. When it suspended the Stormont structures, in March 1972, the British government had thus assembled a 'strategic toolbox' that was to be employed – in one way or another – in the 26 years to come.

3.1 The border is not an issue? The emergence of an Irish dimension

In August 1969, there had been considerable pressure on the British government to abolish the Home Rule structures in Northern Ireland and replace them with the direct rule of the province from London. Both within and outside the United Kingdom, Westminster was increasingly held liable for a situation for which it perceived itself not to be responsible.[1] Yet, rather than exercising the supreme authority of the United Kingdom government under Section 75 of the Government of Ireland Act (1920) (that is, to take over the government of the province), the British government concluded that 'it would be better to avoid direct intervention and [instead] use the Northern Ireland Government as agents'.[2]

Given London's assumptions about Ireland as 'a place apart', the decision to keep Stormont in place was well within the traditional framework of the British strategic tradition. First, there was a feeling amongst Cabinet members that they did not possess the necessary knowledge about Northern Ireland to take over political responsibility. Home Secretary Callaghan (with whom the responsibility for Northern Ireland lay) confessed that most MP's 'knew less about Northern Ireland than we knew about our distant colonies, on the far side of the earth',[3] and Denis Healey, the Defence Secretary, admitted that 'we shall be as blind men leading the blind if we have to go in there knowing nothing about the place'.[4] According to Prime Minister Wilson, this had resulted from 'years of neglect'[5] under the Tories, but it had actually continued under his Labour government. In fact, mutual neglect was the foundation on which the post-1920 constitutional relationship between Northern Ireland and Great Britain had rested (see 1.4). Second, most members of the Cabinet conceptualised the conflict in historical terms, and one lesson that the government thought to have learned from Anglo-Irish history was that British interventions in Ireland caused more harm than good. The assumption was that – once politically drawn into Ireland – the British

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[1] Callaghan *A House*, p. 105
[2] PRO, CAB 128/44/41, 19 August 1969
[3] Ibid., p. 117
[4] Healey, quoted in Crossmann, p. 478
[5] Wilson, *The Labour Government*, p. 876

government would take over an open-ended commitment in a conflict to which there was no solution. The British press analysed the conflict in similar terms, and the newspapers were full of reminders that 'the English [might] have long since forgotten all about the Coercion Acts, the Irish revolution and the Black and Tans. The Irish have not'.[6] At the Cabinet meeting on 19 August 1969, Healey therefore cautioned the demand for greater political intervention. Tony Benn, another Cabinet member, noted that 'although.. [Healey] had sympathy with the Catholics, he had to point out that... we should be once again in the 1911-14 situation' (see 1.4).[7] Third, and most importantly, there was genuine fear that the majority community would resist the abolition of Stormont actively, and that Protestant extremists, such as the followers of the Reverend Ian Paisley, would launch a civil war if the government was seen as giving in to the Catholics. Crossman, a member of the Cabinet committee on Northern Ireland, noted: 'Callaghan and Healey reminded us that ... the Protestants are the majority and we can't afford to alienate them'.[8] Radical constitutional action, such as a unilateral declaration of withdrawal from Northern Ireland, was therefore ruled out. As Benn observed: 'Britain cannot walk out of Ulster entirely, although we had considered it as an alternative... [Michael Stewart, the Foreign Secretary] thought that awful as it would be to take over responsibility, it would be less awful than walking out'.[9]

Hence, Westminster's constitutional response in 1969 is best understood as an attempt to revitalise the Home Rule structures which had allowed the British government to abdicate its political responsibility for the province without raising the question of withdrawal. Westminster's objective was to restore a reformed status quo ante, so that the troops could be withdrawn and Northern Ireland be re-insulated from Great Britain. This strategy was set out in the so-called Downing Street Declaration (DSD), which was agreed by Wilson and Northern Ireland Prime Minister James Chichester-Clark on 19 August 1969. It affirmed that the border was 'not an issue', and that Northern

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[6] 'Dublin's voice – and some dangers', *The Times*, 15 August 1969
[7] T. Benn, *Office Without Power*, p. 196
[8] Crossmann, p. 622
[9] Benn, *Office Without Power*, p. 198

Ireland would 'not cease to be part of the United Kingdom without the consent of the people of Northern Ireland'.[10] Furthermore, the Home Rule parliament at Stormont would, from then on, 'take into account at all times the views of Her Majesty's Government in the United Kingdom'.[11] The only substantial transfer of power – the General Officer Commanding of the Army (GOC) assumed control of the local security forces – came about as a consequence of the deployment of the British Army. The need for greater formal control was substituted for a mixture of public commitments and threats. London promised to protect the Catholic minority from further violence, and it guaranteed that Catholics would be treated fairly by the Northern Ireland government. The Stormont government, in turn, was put on probation, that is, the continued existence of the Home Rule institutions depended on it carrying through a programme of reform that would ensure British standards of citizenship.

Whilst following traditional parameters, Westminster's 1969 strategy was impractical, irresolute and inconsistent as a means of providing a durable solution. The decision to allow Stormont to reform itself showed that the overriding priority was to maintain the existing constitutional relationship and avoid a possible 'Protestant backlash', which was thought to be inevitable if Stormont was put into question. In practice, Stormont lacked the determination to carry through an agenda that would have limited its power, or which could be seen as such by its hardline Unionist supporters. As a result of Westminster's retreatist attitude towards Northern Ireland and the relatively unchallenged position the Unionists had thus been in until 1969, the Stormont government had come to define the relationship with London as a zero-sum game in which any attempt to influence the way in which Northern Ireland was governed was interpreted as outside interference, particularly when it appeared to benefit the Catholic minority.[12] In this regard, the threat the British government had communicated was not very effective as a means of coercing good behaviour. The Northern Ireland government was well

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[10] 'Text of a Communiqué and Declaration issued after a meeting held at 10 Downing Street on 19 August 1969', Cmd. 4154 (London 1969), p. 3
[11] Ibid.
[12] See H. Roberts, *Northern Ireland and the Algerian Analogy* (Belfast 1986), p. 11

aware of London's reluctance to take over the government of the province, and the press (rightly) assumed that Westminster would take this step 'only as a last resort'.[13] The threshold for intervention had therefore been set very high, and as there were no lesser sanctions with which Stormont could be coerced, Chichester-Clark and his colleagues had considerable scope to water down Westminster's demands. Simply put, Westminster threatened 'massive retaliation' when a more flexible instrument would have been needed, and the commitment the DSD had given to the Catholic community was consequently difficult to carry out. As a substitute, Callaghan embarked on a series of high-profile visits to Northern Ireland, where he was widely perceived as a 'major-league performer showing the parish-pump locals how to run their affairs'.[14] This suited his personal ambitions and showed the British public that the government was 'doing something' about Northern Ireland, yet at the same time it undermined the authority of the Unionist government. It thus weakened the instrument it was supposed to revitalise, and it contributed to the fragmentation of the Unionist Party whose leaders, such as the then Minister for Development, Brian Faulkner, despised 'these rather superficial circuses and messianic visits'.[15] In addition, the continued existence of Stormont as the only source of political power in the province maintained an asymmetry in military and political control which provided fertile soil on which the national question was to resurface. Whilst telling the Army to act impartially, the British government tied its political authority to the Unionist government which had been made responsible for most of the grievances the civil rights movement of 1967 and 1968 had been protesting against. As a consequence, Westminster compromised its role as an 'honest broker' in what had started as an inter-communal conflict (see 3.3).

The Conservative government under Prime Minister Heath and Home Secretary Maudling (from June 1970) continued to operate within the DSD framework, albeit in a dramatically changed environment. Callaghan has since argued that if the 'change which I initiated had been followed up vigorously after 1970 when I left office,... the worst of the troubles might have

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[13] 'Ulster finds her Husak', *The Spectator*, 23 August 1969, p. 3
[14] K.O. Morgan, *Callaghan. A Life* (Oxford 1997), p. 349
[15] B. Faulkner, *Memoirs of a Statesman* (London 1978), p. 92

been avoided.'[16] Arguably, and contrary to his claim, it was precisely *because* Callaghan's strategy was maintained that the overall situation further worsened. Like Callaghan, Maudling hinted at Direct Rule if the Stormont government did not continue the course of reform, and he reaffirmed Westminster's role as a protector of the minority.[17] However, the new government was now faced with a military campaign that had unfolded an entirely different dynamic. PIRA had succeeded in bringing about a repressive reaction on behalf of the security forces that gradually exposed the imbalance of political and military control that had been formalised in the DSD, and it skilfully escalated its campaign up to the point when, in early 1971, it launched an all-out offensive against what it perceived to be the 'British forces of occupation'. In addition, the constitutional Nationalists of the Social Democratic and Labour Party (SDLP) withdrew their representatives from the Stormont parliament in July 1971, thus depriving the Home Rule structures of any remaining legitimacy (see 3.3). On the Protestant side, London acknowledged that the ruling Unionist Party was gradually disintegrating under the conflicting pressures from Westminster and the party's more radical wing, the latter of which appeared likely to assume power and establish 'a regime whose policies we [the British government] could not accept'.[18] With almost 15,000 British troops in the province and growing discontent about the crisis management policy of the British government, the projected costs of proceeding along the lines of the 1969 strategy had therefore clearly outweighed the assumed benefits – the existing Home Rule arrangement had lost its value, and indeed, even before the failure of internment without trial in early August (see 3.2), the Cabinet concluded that 'the situation was such... that we now had seriously to contemplate the possibility that we might be compelled to institute direct rule'.[19]

The failure of internment without trial compelled London to abandon its 1969 strategy (see 3.3). The reassessment started from the assumption that 'past

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[16] Lord Callaghan of Cardiff (James Callaghan), letter to author, 26 July 2000
[17] 'Ulster direct rule hint by Maudling', *The Times*, 11 August 1970
[18] PRO, CAB 128/49/40, 22 July 1971
[19] Ibid.

policy on Northern Ireland is in ruins', and that 'a new initiative is imperative'.[20] On 2 September, the Central Policy Review Staff supplied Heath with a list of alternative courses of action. It included the repartition of the province, the joint government of the province by Dublin and London, and a devolved 'coalition' government between representatives of minority and majority.[21] The repartition of Northern Ireland was instantly eliminated from the list, as it 'would prove impracticable in a city such as Belfast, where the two communities were closely intermingled; and it would encounter the most bitter opposition'.[22] Joint government was believed to be unacceptable to the majority, as it implied not only the abolition of Stormont (as in Direct Rule), but also the sharing of sovereignty with the Republic of Ireland. The prospects of a coalition – or power-sharing – government were judged to be unrealistic given the conflicting national aspirations of the two communities (see 3.3). However, in a crucial change of approach, London made it clear that modifications of the province's internal constitution would henceforth be seen as a separate matter from the guarantee of maintaining Northern Ireland's overall constitutional position as part of the United Kingdom. As the Cabinet minutes from 21 September 1971 state:

> It was important to distinguish between the constitutional status of Northern Ireland as an integral part of the United Kingdom and the constitutional arrangement within the Province in the sense of the form and scope of its parliamentary and administrative organs. Provided that the constitutional status of the province was not called in question, there was no aspect of the constitutional arrangements which could not properly be brought under review.[23]

London's flexibility with regard to Northern Ireland's internal constitution, and the eventual co-optation of the 'coalition' idea, can largely be attributed to the growing influence of, and pressure from, the Irish government. The decision to co-operate more closely with Dublin resulted from instinct as well as necessity. On the one hand, in a typical expression of the British tradition, Heath believed that it was natural for 'the two parts of Ireland' to maintain strong economic, social and cultural links, and he saw the previous lack of

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[20] PRO, CAB 129/158/24, 30 September 1971
[21] Heath, p. 430
[22] PRO, CAB 129/49/47, 21 September 1971

such co-operation as 'a major factor in the... lack of understanding between the two communities within Northern Ireland'.[24] On the other hand, after the failure of internment, Dublin was the only representative of constitutional Nationalism that continued to speak to the British government, and if London wanted to succeed in re-engaging the minority, it crucially needed to win over the Irish government as an ally. Besides, Dublin's interests were not perceived as being substantially different from its own. Far from carrying out a policy of active intervention, the Irish government had been anxious to stop the conflict from spilling over into the Republic of Ireland, and Prime Minister Jack Lynch was accordingly praised by London as 'exerting as much influence towards moderation as the political situation in the Republic allowed him'.[25] Whilst strong rhetorical postures appeased Nationalist sentiment as well as Nationalist hardliners within the Irish Cabinet, Dublin had – in practice – pursued a reformist agenda on behalf of the minority. Its objective was to bring about the removal of Stormont, and to establish some channel that would formalise a say for the Irish government in the administration of Northern Ireland.[26] In addition, Lynch had suggested the idea of formalised power-sharing at a time when London still considered it sufficient to include a small number of prominent Catholics in an otherwise unreformed Stormont (see 3.3).[27]

The Anglo-Irish summit on 6 September 1971 was followed by a series of changes that demonstrated the lengths to which the British government would go in order to keep the British-Irish *rapprochement* intact. One such change concerned the gradual co-option of power-sharing as a way of accommodating the Nationalist minority (see 3.3). Another related to the explicit expression of British neutrality. Lynch managed to impress upon Heath that 'the only way to bring back the disaffected Northern Catholics into public life was to give them even the slightest ray of hope about the British attitude to reunification'.[28] As a result, the British government rephrased the

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[23] Ibid.
[24] Heath, pp. 430, 432
[25] PRO, CAB 128/49/9, 9 February 1971
[26] See J. Peck, *Dublin from Downing Street* (London 1978), pp. 124-39
[27] PRO, CAB 128/49/44, 16 August 1971
[28] Lynch, quoted in Peck, p. 135

consent principle in favour of Nationalist aspirations, so that it became obvious that there was no principal objection to Irish unity on the British side. On 15 November, Heath thus became 'the first British Prime Minister to declare that Britain has no selfish interest in Northern Ireland'.[29] At the Lord Mayor of London's annual banquet, he emphasised that the consent principle did not contradict the minority's longing for Irish unity:

> Many Catholics in Northern Ireland would like to see Northern Ireland unified with the South. That is understandable. It is legitimate that they should seek to further that aim by democratic and constitutional means. If at some future date the majority of the people in Northern Ireland want unification and express that desire in the appropriate constitutional manner, I do not believe any British Government would stand in the way..[30]

Two weeks later, the Home Secretary reinforced this message by giving an even stronger affirmation of British neutrality. In the House of Commons, Maudling declared:

> [I]f, by agreement, the North and the South should at some time decide to come together in a United Ireland, if, by agreement, this should be their wish, then not only would we not obstruct to that solution but, I am sure, the whole British people would warmly welcome it.[31]

One might argue that this statement almost abandoned the principle of neutrality in favour of endorsing the idea of a united Ireland on behalf of 'the whole British people'. It is important to note, however, that the change in rhetoric indicated no fundamental shift in British policy. British constitutional strategy continued to be guided by the notion that whilst internal arrangements could be changed, the overall constitutional status as part of the United Kingdom remained the same as long as there was a majority in favour of the Union. As Maudling explained:

> The issue... is not the border because everyone knows that the border will not be changed in the foreseeable future... The real issue of

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[29] Heath, p. 432
[30] Heath, quoted in HC, Vol. 826, c. 1586, 17 November 1971
[31] HC, Vol. 827, c. 38, 29 November 1971

> politics in Northern Ireland is how, within the existing boundaries, two communities can live together. That is what really matters.[32]

Westminster's decision to suspend Stormont – in March 1972 – needs to be seen in the context of the decisions that had been taken in September 1971. In that sense, it remains correct that the introduction of Direct Rule was a result of PIRA's campaign in that its intensity, particularly after 'Bloody Sunday' (see 3.2), helped to override London's fears of the so-called 'Protestant backlash'.[33] Yet it is equally true that London had been disenchanted about the lack of political progress many months before. One might therefore contend that whilst the British government would have preferred to introduce fundamental reforms without having to assume the full responsibility for the government of the province, it had become increasingly agnostic about having to do so. As shown above, London had long moved away from the notion that the existing Home Rule structures had to be preserved at any price. Accordingly, Heath believed that 'we should now devote all our energies towards working for a lasting, cross-community settlement – and only direct rule could offer us the breathing space necessary for building it'.[34]

3.2 A swift exit? From peace-keeping to counterinsurgency

The deployment of the Army to the streets of Derry-City on 14 August 1969 is widely seen as the first significant intervention of the British government in the current conflict. However, the ideological assumptions that have guided the use of the military instrument after the deployment were identical to those in the months before 15 August. The supposed lessons of history dominated the minds of the Cabinet, and these were that British soldiers could do no good on Irish soil. Wilson believed that '[i]n Roman Catholic circles British troops, recalling Black and Tan memories, could be evocative', and the

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[32] Ibid., cc. 40-1
[33] Sir Kenneth Bloomfield, interview with author, 10 August 2000
[34] Heath, p. 436

decision to introduce them 'would unite both sides against them'.[35] London's military strategy before 15 August 1969 was therefore guided by its desire to avoid the deployment of British troops, to agree to it only as a last resort and to make clear to the Stormont government that it had to exhaust its own resources before any request for British troops could be considered. This approach proved highly ineffective. It contributed to a further erosion of the local security forces' credibility, and it thus made the eventual introduction of the Army inevitable. On 14 August, London eventually agreed to Stormont's request to send British troops 'in aid of the civil power'.

Although the British soldiers were hailed by the Catholics on their arrival, London was convinced that the peace could not last for long. As early as 19 August, Healey warned that 'there were already signs that the honeymoon was ending'.[36] As soon as the troops were on the ground, London's efforts therefore focused on the 're-Ulsterisation' of the conflict, thus enabling the government to withdraw its troops from Northern Ireland as quickly as possible. As Callaghan stated:

> The conduct of the troops had been exemplary, but they were not equipped or trained to do a long-term policing job... This made it all the more urgent to press on with the reorganisation of the regular police forces and the restoration of public confidence in them.[37]

Hence, the troops were primarily regarded as a means with which to produce a period of calm in which Stormont's security forces were reformed and then re-introduced to the Catholic areas of Belfast and Derry-City. In this period of transition, the troops were supposed to act 'firm and cool and fair'.[38] The British units were to avoid anything that could compromise their perceived position as non-partisan outsiders to an inter-communal conflict, that is, they were to act as peacekeepers who helped cooling down a situation of civil disorder that had temporarily got out of control. Accordingly, one soldier remembers that '[w]e were told to regard our role as the "Midas" touch –

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[35] Wilson, *The Labour Government*, p. 872
[36] PRO, CAB, 128/44/41, 19 August 1969
[37] PRO, CAB, 128/44/42, 4 September 1969
[38] Wilson, *The Labour Government*, p. 877

minimum force, impartiality, discipline, alertness and security'.[39] One might therefore argue that 'minimum force' meant 'minimum action', and indeed the newly appointed (English) head of the Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC), Arthur Young, described his approach as 'softly, softly'.[40] This was particularly true when it was thought that the use of force would cause disruption, or that it would make the security forces unpopular with one or the other community. Protestant marches as well as paramilitary funerals were allowed to go ahead, and the troops failed to establish a presence in the so-called 'No Go' areas of Derry-City and West-Belfast where the security forces only operated sporadically and PIRA was therefore free to organise.

The *ad hoc* nature of the 1969 security arrangements provides evidence not only for Westminster's lack of preparation, but also for its view that the Army's deployment was a temporary operation that was likely to be terminated within months. In theory, all the security forces in the province were under the command of the GOC, Lieutenant General Ian Freeland, whilst Freeland himself was accountable to the MoD. In reality, though, MoD, Home Office and the Northern Ireland government all believed themselves to be in charge. The so-called Joint Security Committee (JSC), which advised the GOC, provided a forum for Unionist politicians to complain to the GOC that the Army was not 'tough enough', but it did little to improve the communication between civil and military authorities. Heath's Defence Secretary, Carrington, repeatedly complained that Northern Ireland ministers in the JSC 'had no constructive suggestions of their own to offer'.[41] Furthermore, the GOC's role *vis-à-vis* the RUC was watered down to one of mere 'co-ordination' in October 1969, so that tensions between police and army added to the confusion of responsibilities. Also, since the establishment of an intelligence network was considered unnecessary, and as neither of the intelligence services had operated in Northern Ireland before the troops arrived,[42] the Army depended on information that was supplied by the RUC's Special Branch. The Special Branch, however, was less than anxious to

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[39] 'Peter', quoted in J. Lindsay (ed.), *Brits Speak Out. British Soldiers' Impressions of the Northern Ireland Conflict* (Londonderry 1998), p. 25
[40] Young, quoted in 'Military police take over in Bogside', *The Times*, 13 October 1969
[41] PRO, CAB 128/49/15, 22 March 1971
[42] J. Bloch, P. Fitzgerald, *British Intelligence and Covert Action* (Dingle 1983), pp. 212-3

share its insights, and professional rivalry between Army and RUC turned out to be a source of friction for many years to come.

The strength of London's focus on a 'swift exit' can be shown best by describing the government's response to the emergence of PIRA. By the end of October 1969, violence on the streets had almost completely died down. Callaghan noted that the atmosphere in the Home Office became 'much more relaxed'.[43] It looked as if time had come to begin scaling down the military presence, and in late January 1970, three of the eight major Army units that had originally been sent to Northern Ireland were withdrawn.[44] In an early chronology of the conflict, an American journalist observed:

> The Labor government appeared to some to proceed on the assumption that its problems in Ulster were solved, or nearly so... When Oliver Wright, Harold Wilson's representative in Northern Ireland, ended his tour of duty there in March, he announced at a press conference: 'Cheer up. Things are better than you think.'[45]

However, from early 1970, the conflict started to change. In the hitherto peaceful Catholic areas of Derry-City and Belfast, riots became a feature of everyday life, and in contrast to the months before, the rioters would turn against the army as soon as the soldiers arrived on the scene. PIRA had only split from the Official IRA (OIRA) in January, and it clearly needed time to recruit and organise. Nevertheless, it was obvious that PIRA intended to start a military campaign since it had broken from OIRA because it felt that OIRA had neglected military means in favour of parliamentary politics. PIRA's strategy entailed the gradual escalation in the use of the military instrument, that is, to establish itself as a defensive force in the Catholic areas, then to retaliate to individual acts of violence, and finally to launch an offensive against the 'British forces of occupation'.[46] It was in PIRA's interest to maintain some tension in the Catholic areas and to re-direct the anger of the Catholic youths towards the British troops. It can therefore be argued that PIRA provided the co-ordinating role Schelling considers essential in the

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[43] Callaghan, *A House*, p. 131
[44] HC, Vol. 795, c. 125w, 4 February 1970
[45] R. Mansbach (ed.), *Northern Ireland. Half a Century of Partition* (New York 1973), p. 75

successful formation of riots.[47] Accordingly, the president of Provisional *Sinn Fein* (PSF, the political wing of PIRA) was quoted as saying in mid-1970 that 'his organization is not trying to foment violence; they are trying to control it, so that when it occurs it will not be wholly useless'.[48]

Even so, the British government preferred to rationalise the renewed outbreak of violence as a series of isolated incidents with few (if any) political implications – a combination of excessive drinking, long evenings, boredom and 'a taste of excitement' on behalf of the Catholic youths.[49] In early April, when some protestors confronted the troops in a three day long riot on the Ballymurphy estate in West-Belfast, the significance of this event was simply shrugged off. In parliament, Callaghan stated:

> As to sinister elements, I have seen what has been said about this, but I know of no new factions in Northern Ireland that did not exist before; that is the IRA, who talk a great deal in many voices, and the Ulster Volunteer Force... [T]here is no new sinister conspiracy of which I am aware...[50]

London conceptualised the renewed violence as a mere bump on the road towards eventual disengagement, and even though this 'outburst of activity'[51] (Callaghan) implied that the withdrawal of the troops needed to be postponed for some time, it did not raise fundamental questions about the nature of the conflict. In that sense, the decision to impose a 34-hour curfew in the Lower Falls area of West-Belfast in July 1970 represented an aberration rather than an indication of change in Westminster's military strategy. After the end of the curfew, the peacekeeping approach was resumed and the policy of troop reductions was continued, so that by the end of the year, the number of regular forces in Northern Ireland had fallen to the lowest level in more than a year. Only in November, the Commander Land Forces (CLF), recognised that the Army was 'now facing organised terrorism', and that PIRA's

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[46] M.L.R. Smith, *Fighting for Ireland? The Military Strategy of the Irish Republican Movement* (London 1995), pp. 91-2
[47] T.C. Schelling, *The Strategy of Conflict* (Cambridge 1980), p. 90
[48] Ruairi O'Bradaigh, quoted in C.C. O'Brien, *States of Ireland* (London 1972), p. 229
[49] D. Wilsworth, 'A "tangible and obvious" threat', *The Times*, 5 August 1970
[50] HC, Vol. 799, c. 321, 7 April 1970
[51] Ibid.

campaign would result in a 'prolonged campaign of counterinsurgency'.[52] The MoD, however, continued to believe that peace was only months away. Instead of refocusing the military effort, it set up a committee 'to establish the allocation of responsibilities... in the event of a return to normality' as late as December.[53] It took until February 1971 for Carrington to acknowledge that 'the recent riots represented a new phase in the campaign of violence. The disorder was no longer a merely intercommunal matter; and a situation approaching armed conflict was developing'.[54]

The contradictory dynamics of employing the peacekeeping approach in an insurgency situation were obvious. Peacekeeping dictated that the Army should use every means available to stop riots – just like a police force. In Northern Ireland, this meant that whenever PIRA wanted to engage the state's security forces, the troops were anxious to provide an opportunity. As a consequence, the Army was drawn into a vicious circle of attacks and reprisals that increased the sort of violence the presence of the troops was originally meant to stop. From London's point of view, the threat to shoot petrol bombers, the use of rubber bullets, and Stormont's Criminal Justice Act (Northern Ireland) 1970 (which included mandatory sentences for taking part in riots) were meant as a deterrent, preserving the idea of 'minimum force'. As Carrington explained in Cabinet:

> The public statement by the GOC (NI) that individuals carrying firearms were liable to be shot without warning had been intended primarily as a deterrent; the previous instruction to restrict the use of force to the minimum remained in effect and the troops would not resort to firearms unless they themselves had been fired at.[55]

In reality, of course, those measures sent shockwaves through the Catholic community, many of whom could not imagine that a relative or friend would ever end up in prison.[56] As a result, London's military approach alienated the minority, and it helped PIRA to implant itself into the Catholic community.

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[52] 'Army "now facing terrorist threat"', *Irish News*, 3 November 1970
[53] PRO, DEFE 4/253/2, 5 January 1971
[54] PRO, CAB 128/49/9, 9 February 1971
[55] PRO, CAB, 128/47/2, 29 June 1970
[56] M. O'Doherty, *The Trouble with Guns: Republican Strategy and the Provisional IRA* (Belfast 1998), pp. 69-70

Once the government had eventually realised that it was faced with an organised insurgency, defeating PIRA became the immediate aim of London's strategy. Inadvertently, London moved towards a 'military solution', and Maudling declared accordingly that '[t]his is no time for large political initiatives'.[57] Even so, it needs to be noted that the British government recognised that there was no point in employing the military instrument against Catholics in a way that would have rendered the objective of reconciling the minority with Stormont impossible. In this regard, the government acknowledged the danger massive repression posed in terms of alienating the majority of 'moderate' Catholics. As Lord Blaniel, who was a minister at the MoD, stated: 'Our success ... will depend on our ability to isolate the gangsters [PIRA] and to eliminate the hard core of terrorists without at the same time drawing the Army into conflict with a large section of the [Catholic] community'.[58] Furthermore, the security forces' campaign was never thought to be unlimited in the sense that any means would have justified the end of defeating PIRA. Replying to a suggestion in a *Times* leader that the security forces should 'employ the full apparatus of terror' against PIRA, Maudling stated: 'Do they want us to go around murdering people?... To talk about using the methods of the terrorists against the terrorists seems to me very strange'.[59] However, if political imperatives remained implicit, London would simultaneously attempt to maintain Unionist support for the Stormont government. The authority of the Unionist leadership had already been undermined by London's intervention, and there was considerable grassroots pressure on the Northern Ireland government to adopt a more repressive posture towards PIRA. If Westminster wanted Stormont and the Unionist Party in its present form to survive (and at that point, it clearly did), it had to provide the Northern Ireland government with opportunities to be 'tough' on PIRA.

London's fixation on preserving the existing constitutional arrangement, and the need to address the contradictory pressures that resulted from this

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[57] Maudling, quoted in 'Holding the Cat's Cradle', *The Times*, 2 March 1971
[58] HC, Vol. 815, c. 368, 6 April 1971
[59] Maudling, quoted in 'Progress in Ulster top Maudling priority', *The Times*, 3 April 1971

postulate, made it impossible for Westminster to formulate a coherent military strategy. One way of escaping this dilemma was for the government to distance itself from the execution of the military instrument. This tendency could be seen in the attempt to proceed with the policy of Ulsterisation regardless of its sectarian composition. The Ulster Defence Regiment (UDR), a locally recruited regiment of the British Army, had been established in early 1970 as a replacement for the exclusively Protestant Ulster Special Constabulary (USC). At the time of its inception, it was believed that 'the Government will allow the regiment to remain under strength rather than become overwhelmingly Protestant in character'.[60] In 1971, though, Westminster's priority had changed. Ian Gilmour, who was a minister at the MoD, stated that 'we are not bound by the previous government's assurances... We certainly will not hold back recruitment'.[61] Accordingly, the strength of the UDR almost quadrupled in the following two years, reaching its historical peak of 8476 (mostly part-time) members at the end of 1972 (see Appendix). Moreover, London's attempts at distancing itself from the military effort entailed the outsourcing of the responsibility for using force. As a result, actions of the security forces were increasingly defined as technocratic decisions to be taken by the GOC on grounds of efficiency. In Westminster's view, it was sufficient to declare the principle of legality as the only guideline in relation to the level of force, and to leave any operational decisions about the execution of the military instrument to the Army. According to Maudling:

> There is no restraint on the tactic which members of the Army should use other than that they must obviously operate within the law, and the law provides that the Army must never use more than the minimum amount of force required... Some people say this is a political doctrine. It is nothing of the sort. It is the law of the land.[62]

From London's perspective, this approach had the obvious advantage of identifying some common ground between the government, 'moderate' Unionists and 'ordinary' Catholics, all of whom were thought to have little

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[60] 'More than a name', *The Economist*, 6 December 1969, p. 21
[61] HC, Vol. 807, c. 601, 26 November 1971
[62] HC, Vol. 815, cc. 263-4, 6 April 1971

interest in PIRA-style 'kangaroo courts, vigilante law and danger'.[63] However, the postulate of legality was considerably vague, and its tactical implications were difficult to determine. The principal piece of legislation under which the security forces operated, the Special Powers Act (NI) 1922 (SPA), and its wide-ranging powers (for instance, stop and search, the imposition of curfews, internment without trial) were not seen as legitimate by the minority. The principle of 'minimum force' had never been translated into simple operating procedures. The so-called 'Yellow Card' outlined instructions for opening fire, but it was subject to many revisions, and thus perceived as too abstract by many soldiers.[64] There was a flood of ambiguous (and sometimes rather bizarre) Army statements, such as the declaration that 'we are not going to shoot at stone-throwers on sight, but the situation could arise in which someone.. in a crowd throwing stones... would face the risk of being shot'.[65] In practice, it was therefore largely for the troops on the ground to resolve the dilemma of what level of force was appropriate in a given situation. In many cases, this turned out to be far less than what would have been allowed by the law, yet in others, PIRA succeeded in provoking the troops into using excessive force against the civilian population, thus increasing the alienation of the minority (see below).

In addition, the successful implementation of London's strategy was made even more difficult by the lack of accurate intelligence. It was almost impossible for the security forces to differentiate between ordinary Catholics, youthful rioters, and members of PIRA. Although the files of the RUC Special Branch contained some information on older Republicans, the massive influx of young Catholics, who had only been politicised by the events of 1969, went largely unnoticed by the security forces. The absence of accurate information resulted in largescale cordon-and-search operations which alienated the population and achieved relatively little in terms of finding the insurgents. Things were made worse by the continued existence of the 'No Go' areas in Belfast and Derry-City where the Army would not operate

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[63] Maudling, quoted in 'Search and arrest in Ulster', *The Times*, 20 January 1971
[64] For a reprint of the November 1971 version of the Yellow Card, see 'Instructions by the Director of Operations for Opening Fire', *The Times*, 1 February 1972
[65] 'Army statement', 1 November 1971, quoted in R. Deutsch, V. Magowan, *Northern Ireland 1968-72. A Chronology of Events. Vol. 1, 1968-71* (Belfast 1973), p. 80

without the approval of so-called community leaders who often turned out to be the commanders of local PIRA units.[66] Unsurprisingly, Carrington pointed out that '[t]he Army in Northern Ireland has all the weaponry and manpower it needs', and that it needed more intelligence, not more troops.[67]

The introduction of internment without trial on 9 August 1971 exemplified the shortcomings of London's overall strategy. Faulkner, who had succeeded Chichester-Clark as Northern Ireland Prime Minister in March, advanced the idea of internment without trial as soon as he had taken office. Rather than by the military merits, London's response to Faulkner's suggestion was determined by whether it would help Faulkner to fend off grassroots pressure and make the survival of the Stormont government more likely. Accordingly, the Cabinet concluded that 'the institution of direct rule should be regarded as a policy of last resort and that before it was adopted it might well be right to agree that the Northern Ireland Government should invoke their powers of internment'.[68] In public, the issue was portrayed as 'more a decision of practice than of principle' which depended on the Army's assessment as to whether it would be a positive contribution to the counterinsurgency effort.[69] In reality, though, the Army's objections were simply ignored. The GOC, Lieutenant General Harry Tuzo, was strictly opposed to the idea because he believed internment to be ineffective if it was not introduced in the Republic of Ireland at the same time. The government, on the other hand, determined that 'while it was clear that internment... would be more effective if the... Irish Republic could be persuaded to adopt a similar policy in the South, the decision should not depend solely on the response of the Government of the Republic'.[70] As a result, no efforts were made to approach Dublin, and the plans went ahead regardless. When internment was finally agreed between Stormont and Westminster, on 5 August, it was treated as a security measure with no political implications. Neither was there any serious attempt to accompany it by a political initiative that would have balanced its negative

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[66] Sunday Times Insight Team, *Ulster* (London 1972), pp. 236-45
[67] Carrington, quoted in P. Evans, 'Westminster adamant over role of troops', *The Times*, 20 March 1971
[68] PRO, CAB 128/49/40, 22 July 1971
[69] Maudling, quoted in HC, Vol. 815, c. 268, 6 April 1971
[70] PRO, CAB 128/49/40, 22 July 1971

effects in the eyes of the minority, nor did Westminster consider it necessary to communicate the decision to the Catholics.[71] In fact, only one week *after* its introduction, the Cabinet acknowledged 'that it was now necessary to take some political initiative'.[72]

Internment marked the complete alienation of the Catholic community from the existing structures of government, and instead of being defeated, it provided PIRA with an opportunity to escalate its campaign. In the six months before internment, there were 25 deaths; in the following six months, there were 185.[73] As predicted by Tuzo, PIRA's leaders had avoided arrest by fleeing across the border, and due to poor intelligence, it turned out that many internees had no connections with any paramilitary organisation at all. Out of 1,590 people who had been interned between 9 August and 15 December, only 18 were eventually charged with criminal offences.[74] In addition, the use of 'tough' interrogation techniques by the Army was followed by public outrage on both sides of the Irish Sea, thus prompting the so-called Compton inquiry as well as an investigation by the European Commission of Human Rights.[75] The controversial techniques had been employed in previous (colonial) campaigns, and their use in Northern Ireland could have been avoided if London had required the Army to seek approval for every major tactical decision. Maudling's parliamentary statements, however, imply that no previous consultation had taken place.[76] Instead, the government appeared to have stuck to the policy of military absenteeism that had been formulated by Maudling in late July: 'The methods used by the Army in Northern Ireland are the responsibility of the GOC'.[77]

After the failure of internment, London decided to review its strategy. Concerning the use of the military instrument, Westminster now recognised that – within the parameters set by its overall strategy and the technical

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[71] Sunday Times, pp. 263-8
[72] PRO, CAB 128/49/44, 16 August 1971
[73] HC, Vol. 832, cc. 378-9, 6 March 1972
[74] See HC, Vol. 828, c. 313, 16 December 1971
[75] See 'Report of the enquiry into allegations against the security forces of physical brutality in Northern Ireland arising out of events on the 9th August, 1971', Cmnd. 4832 (London 1971)
[76] HC, Vol. 826, c. 235, 16 November 1971
[77] HC, Vol. 822, c. 160w, 29 July 1971

capabilities of the security forces – PIRA could not be defeated. In Tuzo's words, PIRA's campaign was 'an activity that could be carried on until they choose to desist finally from what they are doing'.[78] Under the given circumstances, the 'military solution', that is, the notion of defeating PIRA as a pre-condition for political progress, was no longer viable. In December 1971, Maudling stated that 'even though violence continues, discussion about a political solution should begin now', and that using the military instrument was a means of bringing about 'an acceptable level' of violence,[79] namely one which facilitated political progress and was conducive to the cross-community settlement London had now chosen as its objective (see 3.3). Hence, it was the security forces' function to 'buy time' – the eventual defeat of PIRA would then come about as the result of a 'political solution'.

Even so, the government was slow to act upon its insights. On 30 January 1972, 'Bloody Sunday', the Army shot dead 13 men in Derry-City. Like internment, 'Bloody Sunday' signified the failure of London's earlier approach.[80] Yet, in contrast to the widespread perception that it was a 'watershed' which had 'profound repercussions for British policy',[81] the event simply reinforced Westminster's caution *vis-à-vis* purely 'military solutions'.

3.3 Too little, too late? Abandoning the Stormont system

The 1969 military intervention raised the question as to whether the British government should insist on changes to the political system in Northern

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[78] Tuzo, quoted in J. Kelly, *The Genesis of Revolution* (Dublin 1976), p. 16

[79] Maudling, quoted in J. Chartres, 'Home Secretary says IRA may never be totally eliminated', *The Times*, 16 December 1971

[80] In Derry-City, the Army had allowed itself to become drawn into a turf war with a group of young rioters (the 'Derry Young Hooligans') who operated from within Derry-City's 'No Go' area, the Catholic Bogside. Predictably, the series of engagements over the course of several months had followed the pattern of gradual escalation, and it culminated in the Army's decision to carry out a 'tough' arrest operation. Through the JSC, government ministers were kept informed about the situation in Derry-City, but they failed to act. The decision to carry out the arrest operation was a 'matter for the operational commander on the spot' (Lord Blaniel; HC, Vol. 830, c. 275, 1 February 1972). The fact that many officers still believed 'Bloody Sunday' to be 'highly successful' as a military operation reflects the degree to which military and political considerations had become separated at that time; see M. Dewar, *The British Army in Northern Ireland* (London 1996), p. 60.

[81] P. Taylor, *Brits. The War Against the IRA* (London 2001), p. 226

Ireland. Within the Cabinet, there was no sympathy for the 'Orangemen', and it was clearly felt that the civil disorder had primarily arisen because of the supposed onslaught of Protestant extremists.[82] At the crucial meeting on 19 August, the Cabinet concluded: 'There was a good deal of corroboration for the view that the Catholics had acted largely in self-defence, and there was little evidence to support the view of the Northern Ireland Government that the IRA were mainly responsible'.[83] Nevertheless, London's use of the political instrument was determined by different parameters. The objective of maintaining the constitutional relationship between Great Britain and Northern Ireland was central to the overall aim of minimising London's involvement in Northern Ireland (see 3.1), and Westminster's 1969 political strategy therefore needs to be understood as a function of the constitutional imperative, namely to preserve the status quo ante with devolved structures and a Unionist government at its centre. It follows that there were firm limits on what amount of reform could be implemented. Some reform was necessary to make Stormont acceptable to the minority; if reform appeared to question the objective of Westminster's strategy, however, it ran counter to its purpose. It was agreed that 'we must push Chichester-Clark only as far as he wanted to go'.[84] The actual priorities of the government were thus quite different from what it claimed them to be. According to Callaghan: 'I said I wanted to be a catalyst [for peace, friendship and equality]... At the back of my mind, of course, I still did not want Britain to get more embroiled in Northern Ireland than we had to'.[85]

To the British government, this strategy appeared feasible because Westminster's strategic calculus failed to account for the zero-sum dynamics of politics in a deeply divided society. Despite all its reservations about 'deep-seated passions' and 'atavistic violence', the British government believed that its intervention would make it possible to inject the supposed virtues of British political culture – moderation, fairness, and 'British common sense' – into the province: if the government created political conditions similar to those on the

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[82] See Benn, *Office Without Power*, pp. 196-8
[83] PRO, CAB, 128/44/41, 19 August 1969
[84] Crossman, p. 622
[85] Callaghan, *A House*, p. 71

mainland, people in Northern Ireland would act accordingly; if one guaranteed that 'there is in Northern Ireland as in the rest of the United Kingdom, a common standard of citizenship',[86] if one helped to remove mutual fears, and if one facilitated the communication between the two communities, the vast majority of both Protestants and Catholics would become willing to identify common interests and strike compromises for the sake of a peaceful co-existence. As a result, the government believed that the sectarian divide would gradually be replaced by what Crossman thought of as 'sensible, conservative, Northern Ireland politics'.[87] London's role was that of a mediator to assist in bringing about a 'new contract'[88] (Callaghan) between Catholics and Protestants. There was no need for significant changes to the power structure in Northern Ireland, and the possibility of a 'broadly-based government' was therefore ruled out.[89]

Westminster's 1969 agenda of political reforms corresponded neatly with the findings of the Cameron commission, which had been set up to investigate the disturbances of the previous year (although it was published only in September, Callaghan had had access to the final report by mid-August).[90] Its conclusions were that the Catholics felt a sense of continuing injustice due to political and social grievances, particularly in relation to the allocation of housing, jobs, and the manipulation of electoral boundaries. Also, there was mistrust and fear of the local security forces. The Protestants, on the other hand, had acted out of uncertainty about the constitutional status of the province as part of the United Kingdom.[91] Consequently, the DSD stated that the border was 'not an issue', and it affirmed that 'every citizen of Northern Ireland is entitled to the same equality of treatment and freedom of discrimination... irrespective of political views and religion' (thereby making the British government a 'guarantor' of British standards of civil rights).[92] After further meetings between the two governments and the appointment of

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[86] Callaghan; HC, Vol. 788, c. 49, 13 October 1969
[87] Crossmann, p. 864
[88] Callaghan, *A House*, p. 54
[89] Benn, *Office Without Power*, p. 198
[90] See S. Elliott, W.D. Flackes, *Northern Ireland. A Political Directory, 1968-1999* (Belfast 1999), p. 198
[91] See 'Disturbances in Northern Ireland: report of the commission appointed by the Governor of Northern Ireland' (Cameron Report), Cmd. 532 (Belfast 1969)

various working parties as well as the Hunt Commission on policing, a series of new measures and legal safeguards were announced, for example a law against the incitement of religious hatred, a Commissioner for Complaints, and a Ministry as well as a Commission for Community Relations. The RUC was to be made a 'British' police force, that is, unarmed and under the guidance of a civilian panel; the exclusively Protestant police reserve, the USC, was to be disbanded, and a new locally recruited part-time force was to be established under the command of the British Army. This force was to become the UDR.[93]

To demonstrate why London's 1969 political strategy was misconceived, one has to examine how it was received by the two communities. To the Catholics, the 1969 reform programme appeared to indicate that Westminster had tipped the sectarian balance in favour of them. The leaders of the minority signalled their intention to work the system; some of them even encouraged their fellow Catholics to join the RUC and the newly founded UDR.[94] In October 1969, Callaghan declared proudly that '[t]here is now more working together amongst the leaders of the communities... [and t]he minority is beginning to work with the State much more than it has done hitherto'.[95] On the other side of the sectarian divide, however, Chichester-Clark had come under fierce attacks from within his party. From a Protestant perspective, Westminster had simply intervened on behalf of the Catholics, and the reform of the security apparatus was seen as little more than taking away the only reliable defence against what was perceived as Irish-Catholic expansionism. Instead of softening attitudes, London's intervention had thus fuelled Protestant uncertainty. Consequently, the Stormont government was not merely under pressure from Westminster to implement the reform programme; it also felt the need to assert its independence if it wanted to retain grassroots support and party unity. In practice, agreed reforms were

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[92] 'Text of a Communiqué and Declaration', pp. 3-4
[93] See 'Text of a Communiqué issued on 29 August 1969 at the conclusion of the visit of the Secretary of State for the Home Department to Northern Ireland', Cmd. 4158 (London 1969); 'Text of a Communiqué issued following discussions between the Secretary of State for the Home Department and the Northern Ireland Government in Belfast on 9th and 10th October 1969', Cmd. 4178 (London 1969)
[94] P. Walsh, *From Civil Rights to National War* (Belfast 1989), pp. 51-2
[95] HC, Vol. 788, c. 64, 13 October 1969

thus watered down or delayed when it came to introducing the necessary legislation in the Northern Ireland parliament. By October 1969, Unionist disunity had become a more significant (and immediate) threat to the strategic objective of the British government than Catholic discontent. Since a more intransigent leader of the UUP was believed to make the introduction of Direct Rule inevitable, London's attention shifted away from effecting political change towards reassuring the Protestants and strengthening the 'moderates' within the UUP. Contrary to his later claim that only the Heath government had stopped to press for reforms, Callaghan himself announced as soon as October 1969 that the Stormont government 'has done its part... [It] has carried out to the full the agreement in relation to the attempt to remove discrimination'.[96] In May 1970, he made it clear that 'the overriding consideration so far as we were concerned must remain the importance of refraining from any action which would weaken the position of the Northern Ireland Prime Minister'.[97]

Hence, instead of producing a momentum towards reconciliation and the creation of a 'moderate' majority, the sectarian dynamics in the province had effectively forced the British government to take sides. After the introduction of the 1969 reform programme – and even before most of the suggested measures were on the statute book – the British government had tied its political authority to that of the Unionist government. When it turned out that Stormont was neither capable nor willing to deliver further reforms, Catholic faith in the ability of the British government to temper Unionist rule was gradually used up. As a result, Westminster allowed a power vacuum to emerge that was to be filled by whoever appeared to be the best alternative provider of 'good government'. For most Catholics in Northern Ireland, the traditional answer to this question lay in Irish Nationalism, and from early 1970, PIRA was able to mount its military campaign on the seeds which Westminster's political strategy had sown. Most significantly, instead of political change, the most visible sign of London's 1969 intervention – the British Army – came to symbolise the continuation of Unionist rule. As the independent MP for Mid-Ulster, Bernadette Devlin, pointed out in April 1970:

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[96] C. Warman, T. Jones, 'Callaghan warning to Ulster agitators', *The Times*, 9 October 1969

'At the moment... the Army is enforcing the status quo in Northern Ireland... [T]he British Army is a military organisation, and it is not the duty of a military organisation to change the situation of a country politically or socially.'[98]

Callaghan's early comment that 'life was bleak' seems to indicate that he had noticed the growing disillusionment within the Catholic community.[99] However, it is questionable whether he understood the power political implications of his government's political strategy. Callaghan thought that it was possible for the British government to continue to play the role of a mediator, and he dismissed the ever more frequent unrest (predominantly in the Catholic areas of Belfast) as 'hooliganism', or as 'nonsense in the streets'.[100] Since he conceptualised the disorder as essentially apolitical, and since its strategy had imposed firm limits on further reforms, the government's response to PIRA's early activity was to employ the military instrument (see 3.2). Most importantly, Callaghan's policy was followed up by the Conservatives when they took over power in June 1970. Still believing that the British government was a benevolent outsider, Maudling interpreted the shift from inter-communal violence to attacks on British soldiers as a positive development: it indicated the 'lessening of sectarian tensions', and even in February 1971, he sensed 'a definite growth in the common will to find some solution'.[101] PIRA, on the other hand, was seen as a 'very small... but very dangerous group' of extremists that was attempting to put a halt to the London-led reconciliation effort, but which would eventually be defeated by the 'decent' majority.[102] Again, it seemed that while there was nothing wrong with the overall strategy, the security efforts had to be increased in order to make it work.

The eventual realisation that London's 1969 strategy had failed manifested itself in two events. The first event was the withdrawal of the 'moderate' Catholics from the Stormont parliament in July 1971. By then, the SDLP,

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[97] PRO, CAB, 128/45/21, 7 May 1970
[98] HC, Vol. 798, c. 298, 7 April 1970
[99] Callaghan, quoted in Crossmann, p. 636
[100] C. Warman, T. Jones, 'Callaghan warning to Ulster agitators', *The Times*, 9 October 1969
[101] HC, Vol. 811, cc. 1319-21, 15 February 1971
[102] Ibid.

whose leaders had been willing to work the Stormont system in 1969, had arrived at the conclusion that the existing structures were unreformable.[103] In strategic terms, the withdrawal meant that the SDLP – as the only representative of constitutional Nationalism – had exercised a veto over any form of constitutional or political change in that its willingness to return to Stormont would decide whether the political system could be seen as legitimate. Second, the failure of internment without trial showed that PIRA was not an isolated group of extremists, and that the separation of the military instrument from the other strands of Westminster's strategy had turned out to be counterproductive in that it had allowed London to be seen as merely repressive (see 3.2). Shortly after the decision to introduce internment, the GOC, Lieutenant General Tuzo, acknowledged that 'half the Catholic population sympathises with the IRA, and up to a quarter – that is, about 120,000 people – is ready to give the organisation active support'.[104]

The failure of internment without trial triggered a reassessment of Westminster's strategy. London recognised, for the first time, that the province's internal constitution could not be maintained in its existing form (see 3.1). Considering the assumptions on which the 1969 political strategy had rested, it is nevertheless important to understand that the gradual acceptance of power-sharing as an alternative to Unionist rule represented – somewhat paradoxically – both a break and a continuity in British strategic thought. In sharp contrast to 1969, the British government accepted that Northern Ireland was not only different from the rest of the United Kingdom, but that being different, it also required a different approach. As Maudling explained:

> We are all supporters of the system of democratic election... This is acceptable because the party in government changes. But one must recognise that there are different circumstances in a country where the majority does not change... I look forward... to the time when the political battles of Northern Ireland are fought between Conservative and Labour... In the meantime, it will obviously continue for a long while on the present sectarian basis.[105]

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[103] See SDLP statement, 16 July 1971, quoted in H. Kelly, *How Stormont Fell* (Dublin 1972), pp. 52-3

[104] Tuzo, quoted in 'A fateful decision', *The Economist*, 7 August 1971, p. 13

[105] HC, Vol. 823, cc. 14-5, 22 September 1971

Contrary to the British tradition of majority rule, London now accepted the sectarian divide as a *modus operandi* of its political strategy, and it acknowledged that minority participation in government had to be guaranteed if stability was to emerge. Even so, the idea of a power-sharing government was not merely a tool of managing the sectarian divide – it was a means of overcoming it. As Maudling explained: 'The whole point to what we should be trying to do in Northern Ireland is to promote and expand and increase the will to work together... and without that will, no ingenious constitutional gimmicks can possibly produce success'.[106]

In contrast to Heath's claim that the idea of power-sharing was immediately decided upon as an alternative to the existing Stormont system, Cabinet papers suggest that there was a fair amount of scepticism *vis-à-vis* the viability of a 'coalition' government. London's original idea was to launch a constitutional conference at which both sides would have discussed 'whether it was possible... to devise further means of giving representatives of the minority... an active and prominent role in the processes of government and administration'.[107] Presumably, this would have meant the inclusion of one or two Catholics in an otherwise Unionist government – in any case, it was not identical with the notion of a coalition, which was rejected in Cabinet as late as 2 September 1971 because 'the divergence of basic political beliefs deprived a coalition between Unionist and Nationalist interests of any effective meaning'.[108]

Instead, the gradual move towards a system of formalised power-sharing appears to have resulted from the Anglo-Irish *rapprochement* (see 3.1). At the bilateral summit at Chequers on 6 September, Lynch impressed upon Heath the need to institute a devolved coalition government in which the minority was to obtain a guaranteed share of executive power. Aware of the need to re-engage constitutional Nationalism, Heath replied that 'no suggestion consistent with the existing constitutional status of Northern

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[106] Maudling; HC, Vol. 827, c. 43, 29 November 1971
[107] PRO, CAB 128/49/44, 16 August 1971

Ireland would be excluded',[109] and indeed Westminster now started to advance the formula of an 'active, permanent and guaranteed role [for the minority] in the life and public affairs of the Province'.[110] This demand became known as APG. As a concept, APG remained relatively vague, and it appears as if London hoped that the deliberate lack of explicitness would compel Faulkner to produce far-reaching proposals of his own, thus avoiding the need to abolish Stormont and impose a compulsory coalition. According to Bloomfield, who was Deputy Secretary to the Northern Ireland Cabinet:

> [APG] was a kind of Damocles' sword hanging over the head of Northern Ireland politicans... [T]he question at Stormont was: what do they mean? Do they mean Nationalists in government? ... Faulkner was very antipathetic to the idea of a compulsory coalition. He thought this was a fragmentation bomb: at some stage, it would blow to pieces...[111]

Faulkner's response to the demand for APG included the appointment of a Catholic to the Northern Ireland Cabinet as well as proposals on giving the SDLP a more prominent role in a parliamentary committee system. In his memoirs, he stated that there was no possibility of going any further without triggering a revolt within the Unionist Party.[112] Even so, Faulkner's initiatives failed to persuade the SDLP to return to Stormont, which – under the existing circumstances – meant that they represented no tangible advance in terms of re-establishing the legitimacy of the political system. As a result, an implicit consensus emerged according to which only Dublin's idea of a coalition government was capable of ending the political stalemate, and only Direct Rule would create the necessary 'breathing space' to bring it about (see 3.1).

3.4 Prosperity for everyone? Outspending the conflict

Throughout 1968 and early 1969, the Cabinet saw Northern Ireland as a drain on the exchequer. Since the Treasury's yearly subvention to the

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[108] PRO, CAB 128/49/45, 2 September 1971
[109] PRO, CAB 128/49/46, 9 September 1971
[110] Ibid.
[111] Sir Kenneth Bloomfield, interview with author, 10 August 2000

Northern Ireland government (£74 million in 1968/69)[113] could well have been spent in some parts of the British mainland, Northern Ireland was thought of as little more than a financial nuisance, and there was not much interest in the province's economic conditions. According to Crossman: 'Why should we pay vast sums to a firm in Belfast? What good do we get out of the twelve Ulster M.P.s? What social results do we achieve by pouring into Belfast money which we deny to... the North-East coast?'.[114] This attitude explains why the British government originally considered the use of the economic instrument in a punitive fashion. As Stormont depended on money from London, Westminster believed that Belfast should be coerced with financial sanctions if it refused to introduce political reforms.[115] From London's point of view, this way of employing the economic instrument had the advantage of providing London with a mechanism to achieve its aims without having to reconsider the constitutional relationship.

With the 1969 intervention, however, Westminster's attitude towards the use of the economic instrument changed radically. The punitive approach towards the use of the economic instrument was abandoned, and the British government was now willing to increase the subvention, help with additional funds for housing and the training of the workforce, and provide the province with generous financial incentives to attract further investment. To some extent, Westminster's sudden conversion might be related to the fact that ministers were more aware of economic conditions once Northern Ireland had come to the top of the political agenda. More importantly, though, with British troops on the streets, the government had an interest in improving the conditions in the province quickly so that the Army could be withdrawn.

London's economic strategy was informed by the assumptions of the post-war economic consensus, which appeared to suggest that there was a link between internal peace, even happiness, and prosperity. Callaghan believed that 'there are social and economic problems that bestride the bigotry of the

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[112] Faulkner, pp. 127-31
[113] Northern Ireland Office, *Northern Ireland. Finance and the economy* (London 1974), p. 21
[114] Crossman, p. 187
[115] See Wilson, *The Labour Government*, p. 845; Callaghan, *A House*, p. 10

religious groups there',[116] and the press reminded the government that sectarian strife elsewhere in the United Kingdom (for instance, in Liverpool and Glasgow) had disappeared 'when the slums were cleared and people rehoused in new suburbs'.[117] In the minds of the British Cabinet, economic initiatives to bring down unemployment and raise the living standards were a means of promoting political maturity and lessen sectarian tensions, and therefore a pre-condition for the achievement of the overall aim. As Callaghan argued: 'While civil rights and non-discrimination were of cardinal importance, the problem of Northern Ireland was also to a very large extent an economic one'.[118] Even so, and despite its assumption that sectarian tensions were aggravated by poverty, the government conceptualised the economic dimension of the conflict primarily in absolute terms. Accordingly, Callaghan remarked that the economic problems in Northern Ireland were 'not unique and could be found in some regions of most advanced industrial countries, especially those furthest from the political, economic and cultural centres of power'.[119] In parliament, he explained:

> Complaints about employment are heard just as much among the majority... I saw the hatred of poor Protestants, whose housing and whose lack of employment justify a better deal than they have had and they heap it all on the heads of the Catholics.[120]

As a result, the purpose of the economic instrument was to increase the prosperity in Northern Ireland *as a whole*, and its implementation was based on the experience in Scotland, Wales, and other so-called Development Areas within the United Kingdom, with increased spending on infrastructure and public services as well as additional grants to attract investment from abroad.[121]

Hence, the substantial differences between the communities in terms of income, living standards and employment were of little concern to London, and it was hoped that they would level each other out with the anticipated

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[116] HC, Vol. 788, c. 59, 13 October 1969
[117] 'A faint sense of community', *The Economist*, 29 May 1971, p. 68
[118] PRO, CAB, 128/44/42, 4 September 1969
[119] Callaghan, *A House*, p. 137
[120] HC, Vol. 788, c. 59, 13 October 1969

overall growth of the economy. In London's view, this approach had the advantage of avoiding any controversy about having to favour one group at the expense of another, which was believed to exacerbate divisions and compromise Westminster's self-declared impartiality. Moreover, despite the economic disadvantage *vis-à-vis* the Protestants, London expected the Catholics to appreciate that they were still better off than their neighbours in the Republic of Ireland who, in Heath's words, did not enjoy the same 'standard of living and United Kingdom social benefits'.[122] It follows that Westminster's pro-active role in helping Northern Ireland to attract more investment and improve the technical skills of the workforce was matched by a more defensive approach in relation to economic inequality. Whilst the additional investment would reduce existing inequalities, it was thought, the remaining cases of discrimination could be dealt with on an individual basis, for example by introducing a system of Ombudsmen. Maudling believed that 'the bulk of the grounds for complaint against individual discrimination... will have been eliminated' once those safeguards had been introduced.[123]

It can be argued, therefore, that London's economic strategy in the 1969-72 period largely ignored the sectarian dynamics in the province. With the publication of the Cameron report, Westminster accepted the need to establish a central housing agency which operated on a points scheme, and the reform of local government was – amongst other factors – intended to equalise (or, at least, to 'depoliticise') access to public resources, such as education or health care, by taking away the substantial powers of patronage from the local councils.[124] Yet, the demands for the enforcement of equality in areas other than the provision of public services were not acted upon. In public and private employment, London was content to rely on declarations of goodwill and the work of the Ombudsmen whose powers were limited to pursuing individual cases where proof of discrimination was hard to establish. None of these measures contributed to breaking the existing patterns of

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[121] See 'Northern Ireland Development Plan', Cmd. 547 (Belfast 1970)
[122] Heath, quoted in 'Excerpts From Interview With Prime Minister Heath', *New York Times*, 27 February 1972
[123] HC, Vol. 823, c. 12, 22 September 1971
[124] See J.P. Mackintosh, 'The Report of the Review Body on Local Government in Northern Ireland 1970: The Macrory Report', *Public Administration*, 49:1 (1971), pp. 13-24

recruitment and material distribution which relied on informal mechanisms (for example, recruitment networks, selection criteria, etc.) rather than direct discrimination. On the contrary, as a mechanism to administer the influx of additional money from Westminster, Stormont was kept in place. The 'growth centre' strategy of the Unionist government focused exclusively on the largely Protestant towns in the eastern part of the province, which reinforced existing employment structures and thus tended to favour Protestants.[125] In addition, London's economic strategy was severely undermined by PIRA's military campaign. The overall escalation notwithstanding, PIRA specifically targeted commercial enterprises and building sites as a means of raising the material cost of maintaining Northern Ireland as a part of the United Kingdom. PIRA's actions damaged the attractiveness of Northern Ireland to potential investors, and they almost halted the house building programme in the Catholic working class areas of Belfast and Derry-City where housing conditions were worst whilst PIRA was strongest.[126]

The failure of internment without trial in August 1971 triggered a reassessment of British strategy. Notwithstanding considerable pressure from the opposition to return to a more punitive approach, Westminster stuck to its strategy of providing generous incentives for economic development. Westminster's 1970 Development Plan was a five year programme, and the British government had not expected immediate results. Also, considering that new employment had been created despite the background of violence, there was no reason to assume that London's approach had failed.[127] The only change that could be interpreted as a strategic response to the escalation of the conflict was the creation of the Local Economic Development Unit (LEDU), which recognised that the increase in employment opportunities in the years up to 1973 was mainly due to the expansion of companies that had already been in Northern Ireland,[128] and

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[125] L. O'Dowd, 'Regional Policy' in L. O'Dowd, B. Rolston, M. Tomlinson, *Northern Ireland: Between Civil Rights and Civil War* (London 1980), p. 41
[126] J.A. Oliver, *Working at Stormont* (London 1978), p. 95
[127] See Maudling; HC, Vol. 836, c. *175*, 4 May 1972
[128] B. Rowthorn, N. Wayne, *The Political Economy of Northern Ireland* (Cambridge 1988), pp. 84-5

that the continuing disorder was likely to upset the attraction of outward investment.

3.5 Conclusion

The 1969-72 period was a period of rapid strategic change. London's failure to introduce Direct Rule in 1969 was described as the 'greatest single mistake of British policy during the Troubles'.[129] The eventual abolition of Stormont, on the other hand, was referred to as 'the most important positive decision made by a British party leader... since Gladstone went for Home Rule at the end of 1885'.[130] Hence, what was the exact nature of the change, and what triggered it?

In August 1969, when the British government agreed to provide troops 'in aid of the civil power', it decided that the re-insulation of Northern Ireland from Great Britain would be its principal aim. London's objective was to revitalise and to strengthen the Stormont system, so that the constitutional relationship – with a Unionist-dominated Home Rule parliament in Belfast – could be maintained and the status quo ante be restored. Accordingly, the strategic instrument was employed in order to achieve this objective:

- the constitutional instrument, to reaffirm that 'the border is not an issue'.
- the military instrument, to establish conditions which allowed for the withdrawal of British troops; from late-1970, to 'defeat' PIRA.
- the political instrument, to make Stormont reform itself along 'British standards of citizenship'.
- the economic instrument, to provide generous funds to improve housing and reduce unemployment.

Westminster's reluctance to intervene more forcefully, and its focus on maintaining the province as a self-governing entity, resulted from London's

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[129] Bew, *Northern Ireland. A Chronology*, p. 19
[130] R. Fanning, 'Britain's greatest initiative', *The Spectator*, 1 April 1972, p. 511

alienation from Northern Ireland, derived from its perception that British interventions in 'Irish affairs' were destined to fail, that 'Englishmen' would do more harm than good on Irish soil, and that the only way to make sure that the province remained relatively calm was to maintain the Home Rule arrangement which had allowed Westminster to practice amnesia with regard to Northern Ireland for almost 50 years. This intention appeared feasible because the British government chose to ignore the nature of zero-sum politics in the province. Westminster assumed its intervention to bring about a 'new contract' between Catholics and Protestants, and that changes in the power structure of Stormont were therefore not needed. As it turned out, London's assumptions about the political culture in the province were not viable, and as early as October 1969, the sectarian dynamics forced the British government to side with the Stormont government. As a result, London created a power vacuum on the Catholic side that provided the foundation on which PIRA's challenge could be effective. The initial failure to recognise PIRA as a challenge to its strategy, and – from late-1970 – the inability to formulate a coherent military strategy on the basis of having to maintain support for the *ancien régime* on both sides of the sectarian divide, led to the abdication of responsibilites and the 'outsourcing' of important security decisions.

Only with the escalation of the conflict after the failure of internment in August 1971 did the British government acknowledge that the maintenance of the 'old Stormont' was a strategic strait-jacket from which it had to free itself. Stormont had clearly proved to be an inadequate mechanism to minimise London's involvement in Northern Ireland, and it had therefore lost its value to Westminster. Moreover, the British government was compelled to recognise that the rise of Irish Nationalism, and the effectiveness of PIRA's challenge, was related to the lack of Catholic access to political power, and that the sectarian dynamics had to be accepted in order to be overcome. Consequently, the new objective was to push for devolved structures which *guaranteed* Catholic participation in the government of the province. Accordingly, London's strategy now incorporated the following elements:

- the constitutional instrument, to acknowledge an 'Irish dimension' and establish a close relationship with the Irish government.
- the military instrument, to facilitate political progress.
- the political instrument, to urge 'moderates' on both sides to co-operate in government.
- the economic instrument, to continue the provision of generous subsidies to improve housing and reduce unemployment.

The eventual abolition of Stormont in March 1972 was no indication of a fundamental shift in British government policy. As in 1969, Irish unity was dependent on the consent of the population of Northern Ireland. Also, Westminster's aim had not changed: it was to neutralise Northern Ireland as a political issue, and to minimise its involvement in the province. What had changed, however, was London's understanding of the political dynamics in the province, its determination to keep the Anglo-Irish *rapprochement* intact, and the need to pursue political aims and achieve military progress simultaneously. The outcomes of these changes would become apparent in the 1972-75 period, which is the subject of the following chapter.

4 No quick fix: execution and failure of British strategy, 1972-75

With the abolition of Stormont, the British government freed itself from a constitutional strait jacket. It was now at liberty to implement the strategy it had decided upon after the failure of internment in August 1971. However, as the *Times* warned as early as March 1972, Direct Rule was 'easier to get into than out of'.[1] The following years were thus marked by London's efforts to 'get out' of Direct Rule, and its repeated failure to do so.

In this chapter, it is argued that Westminster's aim remained unchanged: London wanted to contain the conflict and remove itself from direct involvement with Northern Ireland as quickly as possible. The objective of the British government was to return to devolution, albeit with the added element of power-sharing, so that the sectarian divisions were reflected in the make-up of the provincial government, thus guaranteeing permanent access to political power for the hitherto excluded minority. However, in implementing its strategy, London underestimated the significance of constitutional stability, the perception of which was a greater incentive in determining the political choices of the majority community than the promise of self-government. Neither in the case of the 1974 Sunningdale Executive nor with the Constitutional Convention in 1975 was the British government capable of conveying to the Protestants that the Union was safe under the proposed form of devolution. As a result, the majority community opted in favour of Direct Rule rather than devolution with power-sharing on both counts. The significance of constitutional security as an objective in itself was only appreciated once the two experiments had failed, and Direct Rule was consequently seen as the framework which seemed most appropriate to achieve this end before any new attempts at introducting devolution could be launched.

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[1] 'The responsibility comes home', *The Times*, 25 March 1972

4.1 Back to square one – from Sunningdale to Direct Rule

The direct rule of the province from London was a temporary arrangement which the British government hoped to end as soon as possible. Westminster's objective was to restore devolved institutions – in contrast to the previous period, however, the use of the constitutional instrument was now guided by the political imperative of inducing agreement between Unionists and Nationalists, so that power-sharing would become possible (see 4.3).

In order to reassure the Unionists, the British government strongly reaffirmed Northern Ireland's status as part of the United Kingdom. It recognised the 'great feeling of shock'[2] and constitutional uncertainty which the abolition of Stormont had caused in the eyes of many Protestants. Yet the purpose of committing itself to upholding Northern Ireland's constitutional status was also to '[take] the border... out of Northern Ireland politics for a period so that the parties could concentrate on other matters'.[3] Accordingly, the consent principle, which had been re-phrased in favour of Nationalist aspirations in late-1971, was now used to re-emphasise Northern Ireland's present status. As David Howell (an NIO minister in 1972-74) put it: 'We repeated it like a mantra... We said ten times a day they would remain a part of the United Kingdom as long as they wanted to'.[4] In addition, London reinforced its pledge by announcing a so-called 'Border Poll'. The referendum took place on 8 March 1973 and resulted in a clear majority (57.5 per cent of the entire electorate) in favour of Northern Ireland's continued membership of the United Kingdom. To some degree, London's approach could therefore be seen as a return to what Maudling had earlier advocated as 'neutralising' the constitutional issue by making it clear to Unionists and Nationalists alike that there was no possibility of change in the foreseeable future (see 3.1).

However, Westminster's commitment to the Union was skilfully balanced by the second leg of its constitutional strategy, the so-called 'Irish dimension'. As

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[2] Whitelaw; HC, Vol. 838, c. 1072, 12 June 1972
[3] Heath; HC, Vol. 853, c. 1321, 28 March 1973
[4] Lord Howell, interview with author, 6 March 2001

an outcome of the Anglo-Irish *rapprochement* in late 1971, London demanded the creation of common institutions between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland, and it made agreement on the Irish dimension a condition to the successful conclusion of any settlement. On the one hand, the necessity to institutionalise the relationship between North and South derived from the fact that both entities shared the same geographical unit, and that closer co-operation in areas like tourism, agriculture and security was thought to be of mutual benefit. Furthermore, and perhaps more importantly, the British government recognised that 'an element of the minority in Northern Ireland has hitherto seen itself as simply a part of the wider Irish community', and that Irish Nationalist aspirations had to be given an institutionalised point of reference if any settlement was to command widespread acceptance within the minority community.[5] Unlike the prevailing political opinion within the two communities, London believed these considerations to be of practical rather than ideological significance, particularly since it was thought that European integration would gradually 'blur and calm down the differences' between the two countries and lead to increased co-operation in any case.[6] With regard to Unionist sensibilities, the British government hoped that the significance of the Irish dimension would be outweighed by the strong affirmation of Northern Ireland's constitutional status, and that the working of the new institutions would soon show that any fears of being 'sold out to the South' were much ado about nothing.[7]

At the Sunningdale conference in December 1973, London, Dublin and the three parties that would form the 1974 Executive (SDLP, Alliance and UUP) negotiated the practical meaning of the Irish dimension. They agreed that a Council of Ireland would be established (consisting of a Council of Ministers with equal representation from Belfast and Dublin), as well as a Consultative Assembly with members from both legislatures and a permanent Secretariat. The Council of Ministers was to assume 'executive and harmonising

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[5] Northern Ireland Office, *The Future of Northern Ireland. A Paper for Discussion* (London 1972), p. 33
[6] Lord Howell, interview with author, 6 March 2001
[7] See M. Holland, 'Second Thoughts on Sunningdale', *New Statesman*, 14 December 1973, p. 893

functions' in areas of common interest,[8] but any decision would be subject to the unanimous approval of all its members, including the Unionist representatives from Northern Ireland. Significantly, the Irish government accepted 'that there could be no change in the status of Northern Ireland until a majority of the people of Northern Ireland desired a change', and it agreed that a formal agreement would be registered at the United Nations.[9] Contrary to the subsequent perception by the majority community, the provisions of the Sunningdale Agreement could therefore hardly be interpreted as an immediate threat to Northern Ireland's sovereignty, or even as the first step towards the unification of Ireland. According to Faulkner, who led the Unionist delegation:

> We had for the first time... achieved recognition by the Republic of our right to self-determination within our existing boundaries... [and] nothing agreed on at Sunningdale infringed on the powers of the Northern Ireland Assembly by which everything would have to be approved and delegated. Given the overwhelmingly Unionist composition of that body and the unanimity rule in the Council of Ministers we were satisfied that the constitutional integrity of Northern Ireland was secure.[10]

Faulkner's analysis coincided with the view of the British government, whose members were keen to stress that Unionist interests were protected by Dublin's recognition of Northern Ireland and the unanimity rule, which amounted to a Unionist veto in the proposed Council of Ministers.[11]

Despite the pragmatic approach on behalf of the Agreement parties, Sunningdale provided the pretext under which various Loyalist groups succeeded in mobilising the majority community against the power-sharing institutions. From a constitutional perspective, the major flaw of the 1974 arrangement lay in London's assumption that the majority community wished the return to devolved government at any price. Whitelaw insisted that people in Northern Ireland 'do not want to be wholly dominated by Westminster', and

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[8] HC, Vol. 866, c. 38, 13 December 1973
[9] Ibid.
[10] Faulkner, pp. 229, 237
[11] See Heath; HC, Vol. 866, c. 32, 13 December 1973

that Unionists 'yearn for their old administration'.[12] This view, of course, concurred with London's desire to keep Northern Ireland at distance, and it was therefore not further questioned. Consequently, the British government failed to appreciate the underlying motive of the Unionist demand for a 'return to Stormont' which – in the eyes of most Unionists – simply represented a bulwark against the threat of 'Irish expansionism', and thus the best safeguard that the Union with Great Britain would be maintained. The new arrangement could not satisfy this demand for constitutional stability, and it was therefore rejected by the Protestants (see 4.3).

This misapprehension of Unionist constitutional preferences resulted in a significant tactical blunder. In September 1973, Heath decided to put additional pressure on the Northern Ireland party leaders by announcing that the failure to reach agreement would be followed by the 'full integration' of Northern Ireland with Great Britain. In a television interview, he said:

> If there is no prospect of having an executive – if they fail to form an executive or, having formed one, it then breaks down – then under the [Northern Ireland Constitution] Act we return to direct rule, and I think it would have to be direct rule with proper integration. One cannot go on with a temporary arrangement under direct rule.[13]

In strategic terms, Heath intended to raise the stakes by communicating a public threat, assuming that both Unionists and Nationalists wanted a swift return to devolution and were equally appalled by the possibility of being governed from Westminster. Unionists, however, perceived Heath's message in an entirely different way. In their view, Heath had provided them with an attractive alternative to the limited version of Stormont they had been offered: with 60 per cent in favour, full integration with Great Britain was the 'most desired' form of government amongst Northern Ireland Protestants according to a BBC/NOP survey.[14] Hence, instead of a new constitutional arrangement that seemed to weaken rather than strengthen the defensive function of Stormont, there was now the additional option of 'full integration'; and even

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[12] W. Whitelaw, *The Whitelaw Memoirs* (London 1987), p. 122
[13] Heath, quoted in 'Ulster: No integration', *The Spectator*, 29 September 1973, p. 395
[14] 'The Future of Northern Ireland – A Survey of Public Opinion', *The Listener*, 9 May 1974, pp. 590-4

though Unionists were traditionally suspicious of London's ultimate intentions, the prospect of being treated like any part of England, Scotland or Wales appeared to provide more constitutional stability and protect the Union far better than the proposed form of devolution. Accordingly, the (then) deputy leader of the SDLP, John Hume, commented that Heath's statement would 'give outright encouragement to the politicians who wanted to prevent the assembly from working'.[15]

In May 1974, after Loyalist workers had organised a two-week stoppage, the British government suspended the power-sharing institutions and returned to the direct rule of the province from London. Public opinion in Great Britain suggested that, in defying an Act of Parliament, the supposedly 'loyal' Unionists had forfeited their right to call themselves British, and indeed, the *Economist* reported 'increasing revulsion in Britain against any continued involvement in Ulster in any guise'.[16] There can be no doubt that several Cabinet members in the Labour government under Wilson (which had come to power in March) shared those sentiments, and it is no surprise that the implications of a total withdrawal were considered before and immediately after the fall of the Executive.[17] It is nevertheless mistaken to assume that this mood translated into British government policy, or that it guided the use of the constitutional instrument in the 1974-75 period. In view of the anticipated collapse of the power-sharing arrangement and a renewed campaign of violence by PIRA, Wilson decided to set up a Northern Ireland Cabinet sub-committee in April 1974. The purpose of this committee was to explore constitutional alternatives to Direct Rule. It met until early 1976, and according to Rees' diaries, discussion papers on the available constitutional options were submitted three times: in June 1974, November 1975, and December 1975. In each case, the paper included a series of constitutional alternatives, ranging from full integration with Great Britain to devolution, independence, repartition and Irish unity.[18] Whenever it was considered, any form of withdrawal was almost immediately refuted, and the reason for doing

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[15] Hume, quoted in 'Political integration with UK possible "only if all else fails"', *The Times*, 19 September 1973
[16] 'So who does rule?', *The Economist*, 1 June 1974, p. 11
[17] See, for example Benn, *Against,* pp. 137-8
[18] Rees, pp. 99-100, 206, 210

so was remarkably similar to the conclusion other administrations had arrived at before. In the words of Rees, withdrawal would 'precipitate violence on an even greater scale... It would spread to Great Britain and also to the Republic of Ireland. Withdrawal would be a short-sighted policy, but above all it would be an irresponsible policy'.[19]

London's evaluation of constitutional options in mid-1974 was a reaction to the perceived 'lessons' from the Loyalist strike, but it also reflected some of the more traditional British ideas on the use of the constitutional instrument. In line with British tradition, Westminster ruled out the notion of 'agreed independence' on the same grounds as any other form of withdrawal, and it went to considerable lengths to make clear that an independent Northern Ireland would be economically unviable (see 4.4). Rees, for example, stated that the 'wild talk' about independence in some Loyalist circles was in fact 'disloyal'.[20] The belief that Northern Ireland – and even its 'loyal' citizens – were different from the rest of Great Britain, though, was stronger than ever, and it found its expression in Rees' idea of 'Ulster nationalism' (see 4.3). It followed that the British government would continue to pursue some form of devolution. In contrast to Whitelaw's efforts, however, the British government now decided to play down the emphasis on the 'Irish dimension'. Whereas the Heath government had seen the 'link to Dublin' as an essential element of any cross-community settlement, the Irish dimension was now interpreted as being divisive and potentially harmful to the development of a distinct Ulster identity: 'The great weakness with the Sunningdale settlement was that it brought back a Council of Ireland, and the Council of Ireland – not power-sharing – brought down the Sunningdale Agreement'.[21] Instead of promoting 'separate "aspirations" in both Dublin and London', as Sunningdale had allegedly done, the political leaders of the two communities needed to focus on identifying common ground in a so-called Constitutional Convention.[22] Hence, there were no plans for a Council of Ireland or any institutional

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[19] HC, Vol. 903, c. 51, 12 January 1976; see J. Langdon, 'Labour "thought of Ulster pull-out"', *The Guardian*, 19 July 1983; P. Webster, 'Disclosure by Rees angers Dublin', *The Times*, 20 July 1983

[20] C. Walker, 'UDI talk disloyal', *The Times*, 3 June 1975

[21] Lord Merlyn-Rees, interview with author, 6 March 2001

[22] Rees, p. 93

framework between Northern Ireland and the Republic; and rather than providing a point of reference for Nationalist aspirations, the Irish dimension was simply re-defined as a 'practical relationship which ought to exist between two good neighbours with a common land boundary'.[23] Also, there was no need anymore for the close political co-ordination between London and Dublin that had taken place before the suspension of the devolved institutions. In March 1975, Rees declared: 'I am always pleased to listen to [the Irish government]... None the less, the final decision is for Her Majesty's Government. [HMG] have to face the problems in Northern Ireland, and nobody else. That must be clearly understood'.[24]

Despite its clear rejection of both withdrawal and the Council of Ireland, London's use of the strategic instrument after the Loyalist strike was conducive to a sense of constitutional uncertainty which manifested itself in the rise of Loyalist activity. The SDLP politican Paddy Devlin, for example, detected a series of 'withdrawal symptoms', such as the exclusion of the Belfast shipbuilder Harland and Wolff from the British nationalisation scheme, or the closure of some military bases.[25] The Irish foreign minister, Garret FitzGerald, thought that NIO statements about the constitutional status of the province had become more ambiguous;[26] and in May 1975, the Rev William Arlow, a prominent Protestant clergyman, stated that 'the British Government have given a firm commitment to the Provisional IRA that they will withdraw the Army from Northern Ireland'.[27] Under closer examination, it turns out that the alleged 'withdrawal symptoms' had little to do with London's constitutional intentions but rather with its failure to communicate how the use of the political and military instruments related to its constitutional strategy, and – more fundamentally – the incompatibility of its military initiatives with the overall objective of devolution and power-sharing. The re-organisation of the British Army presence resulted from Westminster's 'Normalisation' policy, which postulated an increase in the security role of the police so that Army

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[23] HC, Vol. 882, c. 1956, 5 December 1974
[24] HC, Vol. 888, c. 786, 15 March 1975
[25] P. Devlin, *Straight Left. An Autobiography* (Belfast 1993), pp. 256-7
[26] FitzGerald, p. 244
[27] Arlow, quoted in C. Walker, 'Storm over forecast of Ulster withdrawal', *The Times*, 26 May 1975

numbers could be gradually reduced (see 4.2). London's restraint in prescribing the political and constitutional future of the province was due to Westminster's self-imposed 'non-interference' in the work of the Constitutional Convention, as well as the need to keep the PIRA ceasefire intact (see 4.2, 4.3). The exclusion of Harland and Wolff from the British public ownership scheme, on the other hand, indicated that London was still pursuing devolution as its preferred constitutional option, so that 'when... a satisfactory form of devolved government is arrived at, the Northern Ireland people will have a vested interest in this shipyard'.[28]

When the participants of the Constitutional Convention failed to agree on power-sharing in late 1975, London was forced to reappraise the constitutional options another time. Since two attempts at devolution had failed within two years, and as any form of radical constitutional action was ruled out as a matter of principle, Westminster felt that it had to put its constitutional ambitions on hold. The only remaining option within the parameters of British constitutional strategy was to continue the direct rule of the province from London. The British government, however, had not abandoned the idea of devolution. In fact, it now adopted a more gradualist approach which was to prove influential in the years to come (see 5.3). The possibility of 'full integration' with Great Britain was unanimously rejected at the crucial meeting of the Cabinet sub-committee in December 1975, and 'the preferred option was direct rule in a province "distanced" from the UK, which... might lead to a new form of "community participation" in government'.[29] Community participation, on the other hand, could pave the way for a 'greater council with administrative functions' and – at some point in the future – result in proper devolution with full legislative powers.[30] In the meantime, attention would turn to improving the security as well as the economic conditions as a means of 'normalising' the overall situation in the province. Inadvertently admitting that London had previously failed to appreciate the causal relationship between constitutional security and improvements in the overall political situation, Rees declared that London's

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[28] Orme; HC, Vol. 896, cc. 2483-4, 1 August 1975
[29] Rees, pp. 210
[30] Ibid., p. 277

new approach required 'a period of constitutional stability',[31] and Direct Rule was the framework that seemed most appropriate to achieve this end.

4.2 Bringing back the troops – with or without a settlement

Contrary to 1970, when the defeat of PIRA was considered a pre-condition for political progress, London now understood its political and military aims to be crucially interdependent. Lord Windlesham, who was a Minister of State under Whitelaw, described the 'twin objectives' of London's policy as follows:

> British policy rests on the security forces in Northern Ireland countering effectively and impartially, the use of force... by extremists of whatever kind. At the same time the government is working towards a new form of administration in Northern Ireland.[32]

To succeed in making the military instrument more responsive to Westminster's overall strategy required a highly sophisticated understanding of how to employ it. On the one hand, London assumed that a lower level of violence was conducive to constitutional politics, which meant that the security forces' efforts to clamp down on paramilitary activity had to continue. On the other hand, the government acknowledged that actions by the security forces were perceived as 'political' by the two communities. Thus, whilst fighting the paramilitaries, the military instrument also needed to facilitate the willingness of the political leaders to conform to Westminster's political agenda, to talk to the British government, and to each other. Unionists, for example, generally asked for an increase in the level of force, whereas Nationalists usually demanded the opposite. With regard to the latter, things were further complicated by the need to demonstrate that the only way forward lay in constitutional action by increasing the level of force against militant Republicans, yet at the same time avoiding the alienation of the Nationalist community at large, so that its political leaders would not lose support to PIRA.

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[31] Ibid., p. 277
[32] Lord Windlesham, 'Ulster beyond the breaking point', *The Guardian*, 5 December 1972

In the first months after the introduction of Direct Rule, London found it difficult to balance the different imperatives it had imposed upon the use of the military instrument. The aim of 'regaining the trust' of the minority community, and the belief that parts of PIRA could be persuaded to abandon violence, led to the scaling down of the security forces' presence in Catholic areas (see 4.3). According to M. Dewar, Westminster's failure to maintain the military pressure on the insurgents was a missed opportunity, as 'it allowed the IRA to regroup [and] extend their influence'.[33] More importantly, it increased Unionist suspicions about the ultimate aim of the British government and resulted in the rise of Loyalist paramilitary activity, the rationale of which Faulkner explained as 'telling the government that if it was thought peace could be bought cheaply by a deal with the IRA, they would be buying more trouble from another source'.[34] Likewise, short-term political expediency guided the decision to confer 'Special Category' status on paramilitary prisoners. When a prolonged hunger strike in June 1972 threatened to undermine support for the SDLP, Whitelaw was told that its leaders 'could not continue [to talk to the British government]... unless a concession was made'.[35] By granting Special Category status, Westminster thus provided the insurgents – who regarded themselves as 'political prisoners' – with some legitimacy for this view (see 5.2).

Westminster's capability to realise the 'twin objectives' of reducing violence and achieving political progress increased with the gradual refinement of military tactics. Whilst Army demands for the introduction of curfews and identity cards were ruled out by the government as being 'too rigorous for the law-abiding section of the community',[36] London accepted that the renewed emphasis on collecting low-grade intelligence was necessary to enable the security forces to operate a more targeted approach. Most significantly, better intelligence allowed the British government to employ the tactic of internment without trial as an effective means of reducing violence as well as a political bargaining chip. The initial internment of 342 Catholics in August

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[33] Dewar, p. 64
[34] Faulkner, p. 171
[35] Whitelaw, p. 92
[36] R. Deutsch, V. Magowan, *Northern Ireland 1972-73. A Chronology of Events. Vol. 2, 1972-73* (Belfast 1974), p. 263

1971, most of whom were either entirely unconnected with the paramilitary activity or men at the fringes of the Republican movement, resulted in a sharp rise in violence (see 3.2). From mid-1972, internment was selective, based on hard intelligence, and contributed to the decline in paramilitary activity.[37] At the same time, increased intelligence enabled Westminster to respond to Nationalist leaders who had made internment a focal point in their talks with the British government. With more information on the minority community in general and paramilitary structures in particular, Whitelaw could order the release of those who were no danger any longer without jeopardising the counterinsurgency effort as a whole.[38]

Simultaneously, London sought to re-establish its self-declared role as an 'honest broker'. Far from seeing the Loyalist paramilitaries as 'natural allies' in the fight against PIRA, Westminster stressed its determination to counter any attempt at undermining the state's monopoly on the use of force. Given that London's political efforts were geared towards persuading Nationalists and Unionists to participate in a power-sharing settlement, it would have been highly counterproductive for London to incite sectarian violence and encourage the rise of the Loyalist paramilitaries.[39] Further, acknowledging the damage it had done to the authority of the British government, London principally committed itself to ending internment without trial. Whitelaw described it as 'a repugnant measure' and 'one of the darkest features in the political landscape', yet he believed that 'there are some who cannot be released until the security situation permits'.[40] In an attempt to reconcile the need to determine the security response according to the level of threat with calls for the restoration of the 'rule of law' from within the SDLP, the government introduced some quasi-judicial features that transferred the decision to so-called Commissioners who would examine an individual's case after 28 days, and then either order the release of the person or sign a

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[37] V. Hanna, 'Internment: What are the facts?', *The Listener*, 19 December 1974, pp. 791-2
[38] Whitelaw, quoted in Faulkner, pp. 212, 223
[39] Some Republican sympathisers believe that the British government facilitated the emergence of Loyalist paramilitaries as a means of fighting PIRA; see Faligot, pp. 41-3; J. Newsinger, *Dangerous Men. The SAS and Popular Culture* (London 1997), pp. 33-5
[40] HC, Vol. 838, c. 1077, 12 June 1972

'detention order'.[41] The same logic applied to the introduction of non-jury (so-called Diplock) trials for 'terrorist offences'.[42] As early as September 1971, the Cabinet had considered 'whether the need for recourse to internment might be reduced by creating... special courts operating under a procedure which reduced the dangers of intimidation of witnesses and juries'.[43] The resulting court system was consequently regarded as an instrument in making internment inexpedient whilst ensuring that convictions could again be achieved in the courts of law.

The invasion of the 'No Go' areas on 31 July 1972 provides an excellent case study of how far London had proceeded in re-establishing the essential link between the military instrument and its overall political objective. In security terms, these areas were insurgent strongholds which represented 'black spots' with regard to intelligence and allowed the paramilitaries to organise and recruit freely. Furthermore, as Westminster was unable to assert its authority, London felt that the 'No Go' areas represented a failure of government which 'couldn't be tolerated'.[44] Yet, until late June, London insisted that the removal of the barricades would be a mistake. Westminster believed that employing the military instrument was harmful to the prospect of regaining the trust of the Catholic community and persuading its political leaders to participate in negotiations about power-sharing. Whitelaw declared: 'There would be very substantial casualties indeed... It would not only be morally wrong but would cause a bitterness which would not be redeemed for a long time, if ever'.[45] Less than four weeks later, London had reversed this view and decided to launch a military operation.

How can this apparently sudden change of mind be explained? By mid-July, the British government had abandoned the idea that Republicans could be

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[41] Despite the limitations of the procedure, it is notable that the Commissioners decided in favour of the internee in more than one in three cases; see V. Hanna, 'Internment: What are the facts?', *The Listener*, 19 December 1974, pp. 790-1

[42] The court system was named after Lord Diplock who chaired the commission which recommended its introduction; see 'Report of the Commission to consider legal procedures to deal with terrorist activities in Northern Ireland' (Diplock Report), Cmd. 5185 (London 1972)

[43] PRO, CAB 128/49/48, 29 September 1971

[44] Lord Howell, interview with author, 6 April 2001

involved in a political settlement (see 4.3), and since the first series of substantial talks with the SDLP had been agreed, Whitelaw's emphasis shifted towards reassuring the Unionists, who had threatened to withdraw from the proposed negotiations unless London took a stronger line in relation to the 'No Go' areas.[46] Also, the events on 21 July ('Bloody Friday'), when PIRA launched 26 simultaneous bomb attacks in the city centre of Belfast, presented London with the chance to take advantage of public hostility towards PIRA. In Whitelaw's words, 'the climate was right for the major action in Londonderry'.[47] One might therefore conclude that the same political imperative of facilitating cross-party talks about power-sharing, which had made a military operation impossible in June, now appeared to provide both the necessity and opportunity for employing the military instrument.

'Operation Motorman', as it was called by the Army, focused on Derry-City's Bogside, the largest 'No Go' area, but it also included the removal of several Republican and Loyalist barricades in Belfast. With almost 31,000 troops involved (22,000 Army and 8,500 UDR), it was the largest military operation the British government had carried out since the Suez crisis in 1956. Even so, the only purpose of Operation Motorman was to establish control of the 'No Go' areas. In that sense, it was a strictly limited military operation, and the demonstration of overwhelming military strength in combination with explicit warnings about the nature and timing of the operation need to be understood as a deterrent. Apart from the 'No Go' areas, where the security forces had not operated at all, Operation Motorman did not represent 'a turning point in British policy... in favour of stepped-up repression',[48] as Republican commentators maintained. The penetration of the Bogside, however, resulted in better intelligence and contributed to the effectiveness of the security forces in reducing paramilitary activity: in the three weeks before 'Motorman' there were 2595 shooting incidents across Northern Ireland; in the following three weeks there were only 380.[49] From a political perspective,

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[45] Whitelaw, quoted in J. Chartres, 'Whitelaw sees "modest success" in peace moves', *The Times*, 13 May 1972
[46] See 'The end of the No-Go areas', *The Times*, 1 August 1972
[47] Whitelaw, p. 103
[48] C. De Baróid, *Ballymurphy and the Irish War*, 2nd edition (London 2000), p. 137
[49] Smith, *Fighting for Ireland?*, p. 110

Operation Motorman strengthened the resolve of the SDLP to commit itself to constitutional politics, and reassured the Unionists that there would be no 'sell-out'.[50]

London's reaction to the Loyalist stoppage, which began on 14 May 1974, was guided by the same pattern of strategic calulations like Operation Motorman, albeit with a different outcome. In the first days of the strike, the British government had hoped that intimidation and violence on behalf of the strikers would soon provoke a backlash from the civilian population and thus make the use of the military instrument inexpedient: this approach had worked in favour of the government during an earlier Loyalist strike, and the leaders of the Executive seemed to concur with London's view that to 'sit back and wait' was a valid response for the time being.[51] By the end of the first week, however, intimidation had ceased, and the strike was starting to pick up strong support from the majority community. Any negotiations with the organisers of the stoppage had been ruled out as a matter of not surrendering to the 'bully boys',[52] so that using the military instrument appeared as the only way of resolving the crisis.

The potential pay-offs of military action were significantly reduced when the British government weighed the political and military implications of employing military means. What could be gained politically? Would it be possible to carry out a limited military operation successfully? In contrast to Operation Motorman, London had arrived at negative conclusions *vis-à-vis* both questions. First, despite public statements of support, Westminster had decided that the Executive was likely to fail in any case. The eventual breakdown was thought to be inevitable given the lack of support from the majority community and the reluctance on behalf of the SDLP to compromise on the proposed Council of Ireland. As Rees argued: 'My view was that we had to carry on as if it was going to work, but it wasn't going to work'.[53] Second, the military operation that would have been necessary to 'put down'

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[50] For a concise exploration of Motorman's political impact, see R. Fanning, 'After the military', *The Spectator*, 5 August 1972, p. 209
[51] Anderson, *14 May Days*, p. 43
[52] Wilson, *Final Term*, p. 78
[53] Lord Merlyn-Rees, interview with author, 6 March 2001

the strike was believed to be unlimited. It would not only have involved the continued unblocking of major roads and the restoration of essential services, but also the running of the Northern Ireland civil service,[54] the confrontation with Loyalist paramilitary activity, and the possibility of PIRA exploiting the situation in order to create civil disorder on an even greater scale, thus creating a war on 'two fronts' (see below).[55] Hence, from London's perspective, employing the military instrument would have been beyond the Army's capabilities, and it was likely to ignite the 'civil war' scenario the British government has always cited as the main reason why it maintained the constitutional link to Northern Ireland.[56]

Much has been written about the possibility of a 'two-front war', which the GOC, Frank King, had warned Rees about at the height of the Loyalist strike. One Army officer, writing in the Monday Club magazine, even suggested that the Army performed a military coup in disobeying an alleged order to move against the strikers.[57] Given London's evaluation, it is unlikely that the British government would have given such an order. The notion of a 'two-front war', on the other hand, contains some truth, even if it can hardly be described as a novel insight. Simply put, it was a new formula for London's traditional belief that 'civil war' had to be avoided, which had guided the formulation of British strategy ever since its first intervention in 1969. Furthermore, and perhaps more significantly, British strategic thinking dictated that there could be no 'military solution' since none of the two communities could be forced into accepting a political settlement by military means alone. Whilst many Nationalist leaders – and subsequently even Heath – believed that the strike should have been 'put down',[58] Rees made it very clear that this was not an option for the British government: 'You can't put down a popular rising by killing people. We're not Russia'.[59]

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[54] Lord Orme (Stanley Orme), interview with author, 6 March 2001
[55] Wilson had warned the House of Commons about the so-called 'Scorched Earth' plan which the security forces had discovered in a PIRA hideout; see HC, Vol. 873, cc. 891-2, 13 May 1974
[56] The decision to take over some petrol stations on 27 May was a token gesture which was meant to protect Westminster from accusations of inaction; see Rees, p. 82
[57] See R. Fisk, *The Point of No Return* (London 1975), p. 154
[58] Sir Edward Heath, letter to author, 22 February 2001

The end of the Loyalist strike saw the beginning of a new phase in British military thinking that was described as Normalisation. The aim of returning to a 'normal' situation, where special powers and procedures would not be needed and the police would take the lead in pursuing those who broke the law no matter what their motive, had been intended by the British government for some time. In early 1973, for example, Whitelaw spoke about his government's aim of a 'return to normality' which would have included a 'reduction in the Army strength to what it was before the Troubles'.[60] The principal difference between earlier attempts at 'normality' and the new approach was that London had decided to proceed with this course of action in the absence of a political settlement. One could argue, therefore, that Normalisation was a step back to the 1970 approach, when it was thought that 'terrorism' had to be 'eliminated' as a pre-condition for a political settlement. This, however, was not how the British government saw it in 1974. First, contrary to 1970, Westminster had ceased to believe that violence or 'terrorism' could be defeated entirely, but rather that it should be 'checked'.[61] Second, in London's view, Normalisation did not necessarily entail an increase in the level of force that was used by the security forces, as in 1970, but instead the transformation of how the military instrument was used. Third, in London's view, a reasonably fair political arrangement – Direct Rule – was in place, and an even better one – power-sharing – was on offer, only waiting for the communities to embrace. In that context, 'to civilise the [security] situation'[62] was not only believed necessary in order to make London's engagement more sustainable in Great Britain, but also helpful in 'civilising' the political discourse with regard to the possibility of future devolution.

Normalisation needs to be explained with reference to its two main concepts, Ulsterisation and Criminalisation. In London's view, the reliance on special powers helped the paramilitaries in gaining some legitimacy, implicitly recognised the 'warlike' situation of the conflict, and undermined the state's

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[59] Rees, quoted in P. Taylor, *Provos. The IRA and Sinn Fein* (London 1997), p. 165
[60] HC, Vol. 854, c. 590, 5 April 1973
[61] Rees, p. 111
[62] Roland Moyle, interview with author, 7 April 2001

monopoly on the use of force.[63] Criminalisation, therefore, aimed at abolishing the two most obvious anomalies in Northern Ireland criminal law, the use of detention and the assignment of Special Category status to paramilitary prisoners.[64] The former was made difficult by the continued need for internment as a means of reducing paramilitary activity. The ending of Special Category status, on the other hand, was likely to be met with fierce resistance from Republican as well as Loyalist prisoners. The realisation of both measures was helped by the PIRA ceasefires in late 1974 and 1975 which Rees used as a tool to facilitate the desired changes (see below). In addition, Criminalisation involved a significant modification of governmental rhetoric. Whilst London had always portrayed paramilitary activities in Northern Ireland as 'criminal' in the sense of 'anti-social' and 'anti-constitutional', this approach was now instensified – despite the fact that government representatives were, at the same time, engaged in secret talks with the Republican leadership. Accordingly, Westminster's statements began to include allegations of organised crime and pathological behaviour, such as Rees' declaration that '[p]eople have deep inside them a desire to kill somebody from the other faith... call it religious, call it what one will but I do not believe that they are politically motivated'.[65]

The aim of Ulsterisation was for the indigenous police force – the RUC – to take over all law enforcement. In explaining London's policy, Rees explicitly referred to 'the wish of the British people' who felt that 'the Army should [not] continue indefinitely in Northern Ireland to fulfil a role that is properly that of the police'.[66] In this respect, Ulsterisation aimed at reducing mainland casualties in order to make London's engagement in Northern Ireland more sustainable with regard to public opinion on the British mainland. As Moyle explained:

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[63] See Rees; HC, Vol. 892, c. 644, 15 May 1975
[64] Similar conclusions were reached by the so-called Gardiner Committee which was set up by the British government in 1974; see 'Report of a Committee to consider, in the context of civil liberties and human rights, measures to deal with terrorism in Northern Ireland' (Gardiner Report), Cmd. 5847 (London 1975)
[65] HC, Vol. 876, c. 1281, 9 July 1974
[66] HC, Vol. 882, c. 1953, 5 December 1974

> [I]f we had had a National Service Army when the Troubles blew up, we would never have been able to maintain the British Army in Northern Ireland on a security role for as long as we have done... So there was never quite the same tension, and the desperate need to get the troops out, like in Cyprus in the 1960s ... Nevertheless, we always wanted to create a situation in which the British Army could be withdrawn apart from their normal peacetime garrison.[67]

Contrary to what some Republican sympathisers maintain, Ulsterisation was therefore not a means of making the conflict look more like a war between two hostile groups.[68] Given London's idea of normality, as well as the ideology of Criminalisation, it was not in Westminster's interests to let the Troubles appear as any conflict at all – and indeed, some years later, Callaghan stated that 'I do not accept that there are civil disturbances going on in Northern Ireland at present'.[69]

The idea of Ulsterisation included the progressive reduction of troops from the mainland, yet it would be overly simplistic to maintain that this was thought to involve the blind expansion of *any* local security agency. In fact, whilst the full-time elements within the local security forces expanded from 1975, the UDR's and RUC-Reserve's part-time elements actually started to decline (see Figure 1). In that sense, Ulsterisation needs to be seen as an attempt to professionalise the local security forces (see Figure 2). In addition, the policy entailed changes in the security forces' hierarchy which, ever since 1969, had made the police subordinate to the Army GOC. Under the chairmanship of the NIO, RUC and Army produced a document called 'The Way Ahead', which resulted in the doctrine of 'police primacy', that is, the police would take the lead in counterinsurgency operations.[70] The British government also flirted with ideas like voluntary and community-based policing as a means of increasing the identification of the Catholic community with the police force, yet when London realised that community policing would result in largescale infiltration by the paramilitaries, it was

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[67] Roland Moyle, interview with author, 7 March 2001
[68] See, for example, Reed, *Ireland*, pp. 212-3
[69] HC, Vol. 948, c. 453, 19 April 1978
[70] C. Ryder, *The RUC: a Force under Fire* (London 1989), pp. 140-1

Figure 1: The decline of part-time forces 1969-99
Source: see Appendix

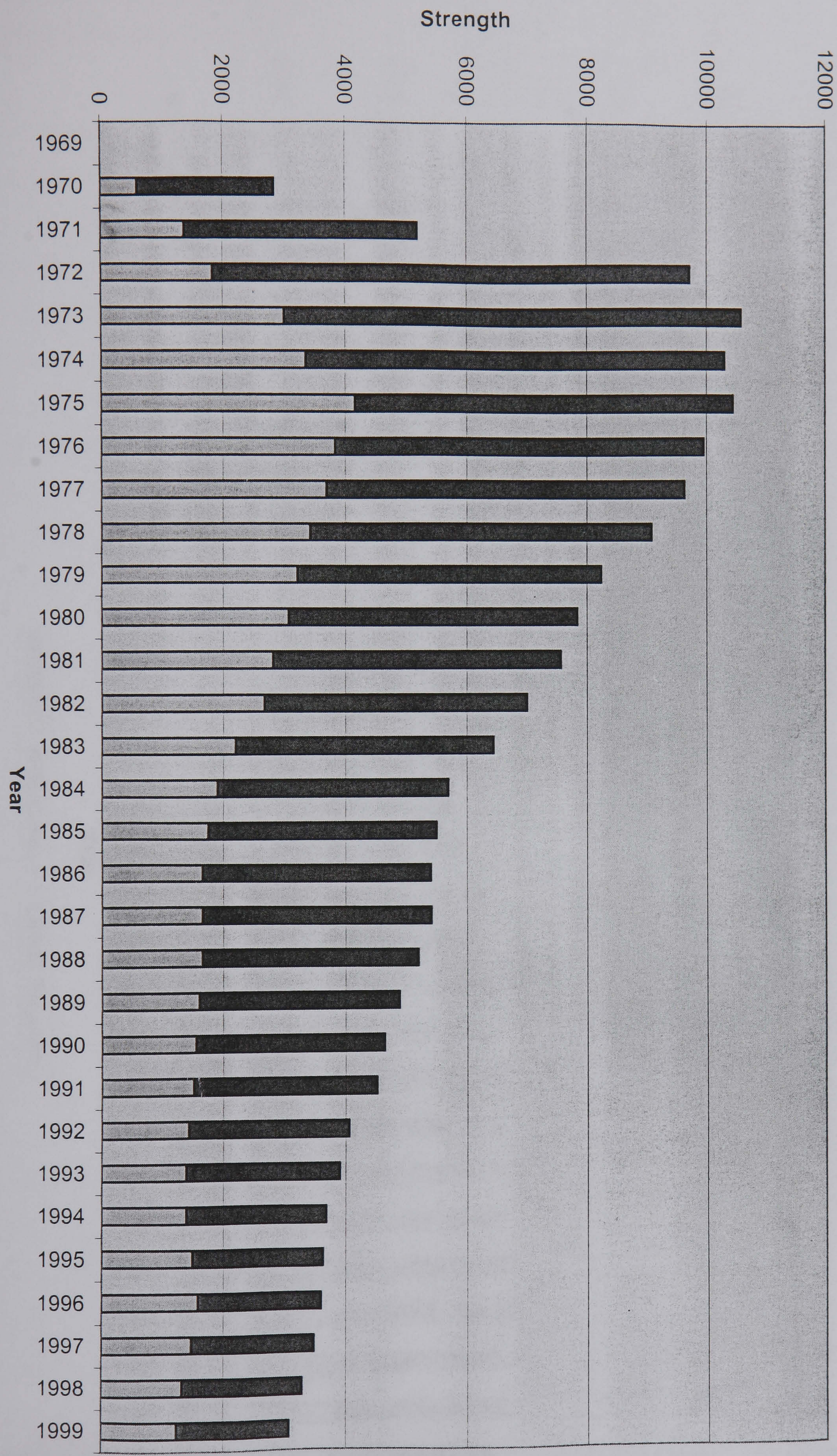
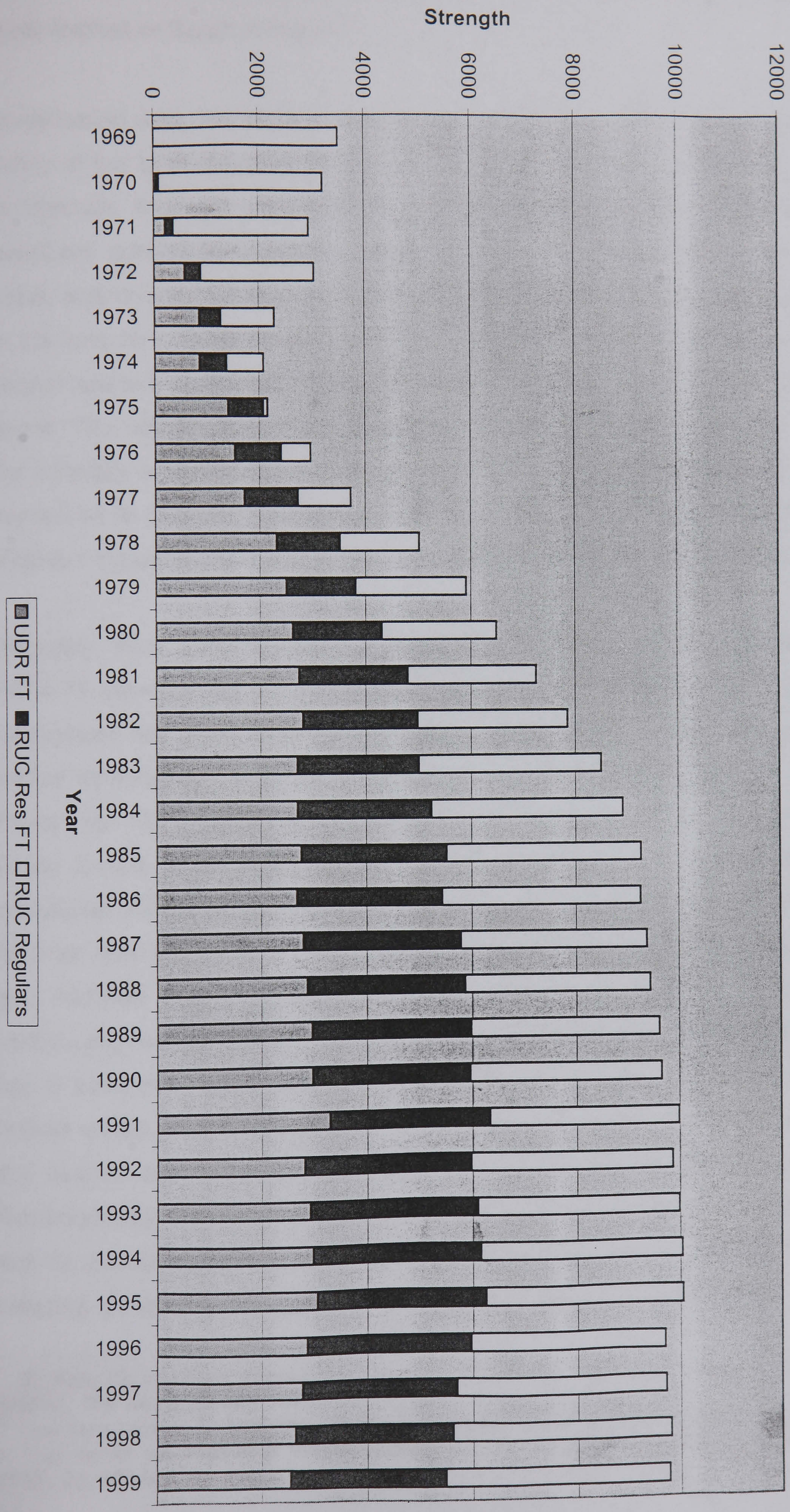


Figure 2: Strength of local full-time forces 1969-99
Source: see Appendix



decided that the Army had to continue its policing role in 'tough' areas like West-Belfast or South Armagh.[71]

Ulsterisation was, therefore, fundamentally different from the 'Vietnamisation' policy of the United States government to which it is frequently compared.[72] In Vietnam, the overriding interest was to 'get out' quickly whilst trying to avoid any admission of defeat. The introduction of Ulsterisation, on the other hand, was driven by the intention to make the engagement more sustainable in the long term, which meant that the intention to reduce troops from Great Britain had to be weighed against the potential effects in political and security terms. This difference in strategic thinking explains why London rejected calls for a locally recruited 'third force' or community policing, and why the Army continued to perform the 'dangerous' tasks in Northern Ireland, whereas in Vietnam the most difficult operations were handed over to the local forces.

Arguably, from a military point of view, the introduction of Normalisation in 1974-75 represented a missed opportunity to defeat PIRA. PIRA's military capabilities had been severely damaged, and the public outrage after the so-called Birmingham pub bombings, when PIRA killed 21 people on 21 November 1974, could have provided the pretext under which the public in Great Britain would have accepted the imposition of draconian security measures. Yet, apart from extending the period for which a suspect could be held for questioning, the Prevention of Terrorism Act (1974) was defensive and focused mainly on containing the violence to Northern Ireland by introducing exclusion orders from the British mainland. Again, the explanation lies in London's overall strategy. The fluidity of the political situation, it was hoped, would offer the opportunity to bring about a settlement which reached out beyond the moderate core and included the paramilitaries (see 4.3). Consequently, the initial rationale of the ceasefires in late-1974 and 1975 was to encourage the 'doves' whilst weakening the 'hawks' within PIRA by creating conditions 'in which the Provisionals' military organisation... would

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[71] R. Fisk, 'Government considering volunteer community police for hard-line areas in N Ireland', *The Times*, 23 July 1975

[72] See, for example, D. McKittrick, D. McVea, *Making Sense of the Troubles* (Belfast 2000), p. 123; for an explanation of Vietnamisation, see P.T. Davidson, *Vietnam at War* (Oxford 1988), pp. 596-9

find it more difficult to start a campaign again'.[73] This resulted in a decrease in the level of force, and it included the tacit agreement not to pursue the leaders of PIRA.[74] When it turned out that PIRA could not be persuaded to 'go political', London's motivation in maintaining the ceasefire shifted towards 'buying time' for the implementation of Normalisation. From mid-1975, Westminster was prepared to excuse even the most obvious violations of the ceasefire, as it allowed the British government to proceed with the phasing out of detention, the building of the new Maze prison, and the restructuring of the RUC. Accordingly, Rees declared in June 1975 that 'it is a fundamental belief that the best way in which to deal with... Northern Ireland is by policing, and by people going through the courts. That is what I hope the ceasefire will give me a chance to do'.[75] From a military perspective, the ceasefires were an effective means of putting the new structures in place, though yet again, the lack of compatibility between the political and military strands of London's strategy meant that they contributed to the sense of constitutional uncertainty and were, therefore, harmful to the prospects of returning to devolution. Also, the lower profile of the Army during the ceasefires meant that PIRA was free to establish its own system of justice in Republican areas, which undermined state authority and provided PIRA with a seemingly legitimate role.

4.3 Struggling for stability - power-sharing and constitutional turmoil

The 1972-73 period represents the British political tradition in Northern Ireland in its least diluted form. On the one hand, there was the notion that the British goverment had to mobilise the 'moderate centre' in order to defeat the 'men of violence'. The aim was to empower the 'decent majority' in Northern Ireland who – regardless of their constitutional preference or religious allegiance – was believed to reject the use of violence and wanted a return to constitutional government. Accordingly, Howell summarised his government's intentions for the years 1972 and 1973 as follows:

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[73] Rees, p. 180
[74] See, for example, the case of IRA leader Seamus Twomey; C. Walker, 'Mr Rees accused of misleading Commons over IRA leader', *The Times*, 30 August 1975
[75] HC, Vol. 894, c. 649, 26 June 1975

> To build up, by every means available, a band of moderate opinion drawn from both sides... To show that it was possible to set up a government again in Northern Ireland which could contain both Catholics and Protestants in fair proportions... To legislate into being a new assembly and a government from it which would satisfy the principle above.[76]

Furthermore, in working towards this objective, London would assume the role of an 'honest broker' who pretended to have no stake in the political conflict other than 'achiev[ing] a stable peace... under conditions of equal opportunity for all its citizens'.[77] This meant that the British government aimed at playing the role of a facilitator.

Even though it was the cornerstone of Westminster's political strategy, the British government had spent little time thinking about the potential participants of a 'coalition government' prior to the abolition of Stormont. Most significantly, London believed that parts of PIRA could be persuaded to participate in constitutional politics. The British government was encouraged by the well-publicised revelations of a young defector from the Republican movement, Maria McGuire, who described serious splits within PIRA and PSF,[78] which were interpreted by Westminster as a conflict between 'hawks' and 'doves'. Accordingly, Whitelaw started to talk 'in hopefully glowing terms' about the presumed leader of the 'doves', David O'Connell, and the idea of 'politicising the Provos... [as] an essential part of [the] solution to the Northern Irish problem'.[79] A two-week ceasefire by PIRA enabled London to arrange a meeting between the leadership of the Republican leadership and a British government delegation in London on 7 July 1972. Retrospectively, Heath and Whitelaw have played down the encounter as a token exercise to demonstrate Republican intransigence,[80] yet the genuine disappointment the British delegation felt at the perceived stubbornness of PIRA (whose leaders had merely presented a list of demands on which they were not prepared to

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[76] D. Howell, 'The policies which prepared the ground for trust in Ulster', *The Times*, 10 February 1975
[77] Lord Windlesham, 'Ulster beyond the breaking point', *The Guardian*, 5 December 1972
[78] See M. McGuire, *To Take Arms. A Year in the Provisional IRA* (London 1973)
[79] M. Holland, 'Miss McGuire and Mr Whitelaw', *New Statesman*, 8 September 1972, p. 307
[80] Whitelaw, p. 101

compromise), suggests that the British government had sincerely hoped that the meeting could lead to a series of consultations, the purpose of which would have been to educate the Republicans about Westminster's motives in maintaining the link to Northern Ireland. In truly British fashion, London seemed to believe that once PIRA had learned about the British position, its leaders would engage in a lengthy process of negotiations, abandon violence and become part of the proposed settlement. Many years later, Heath appeared to confirm this intention: 'When the moment is right, I have no objection to... telling *Sinn Fein* exactly what the Government's position is and trying to influence them to... get [the IRA] to pack it all in'.[81]

Arguably, it was naive for London to assume that PIRA – at the height of its military campaign – could be 'educated' or made susceptible to the British notion of negotiation as a means of teasing out a compromise.[82] As Bew and Patterson put it, in believing that the talks could lead to a negotiated end of the conflict, London was guided by 'a mixture of wishful thinking and an incapacity to understand the dynamics of republicanism as an ideology'.[83] Furthermore, in embarking on the secret talks, Westminster underestimated the degree of constitutional insecurity any attempt at circumventing the Unionists would create within the majority community. Accordingly, the *Economist* reported that the talks had aggravated Protestant fears about a 'secret deal' between the British government and PIRA, and that there was 'now a good deal of talk of civil war in Ulster'.[84] After the talks had been revealed to the public, Whitelaw promised never to talk to PIRA again, and London's actions in the subsequent weeks appear to indicate that the government had abandoned the idea that the Republicans could be made part of the 'moderate centre'. Even so, in early August 1972, Whitelaw pointed out that he had 'committed himself and no one else... neither future government, nor even the present Government'.[85]

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[81] Heath, quoted in 'Heath supports Sinn Fein talks', *The Guardian*, 19 July 1993
[82] See Smith, *Fighting for Ireland?*, p. 106
[83] P. Bew, H. Patterson, *The British State and the Ulster Crisis* (London 1986), p. 51
[84] 'Worried about Willie', *The Economist*, 15 July 1972, pp. 24-5
[85] Whitelaw, quoted in R. Fanning, 'After the military', *The Spectator*, 5 August 1972, p. 209

The process of 'drawing up a band of moderates' started with the so-called Darlington Conference in September 1972, the publication of the Green Paper on 'The Future of Northern Ireland' in the following month, and culminated in the release of the White Paper 'Northern Ireland Constitutional Proposals' (March 1973) which translated the Green Paper principles into a series of suggestions on the shape of the future institutions. On every occasion, the British government restated the consent principle and its commitment to devolution, power-sharing and the Irish dimension. Also, it demanded that any new executive would have to relinquish the semi-independent status and governmental pretence of the 'old' Stormont, but instead be of a 'simple and businesslike character, appropriate to the powers of a regional authority'.[86] Moreover, as a lesson from its pre-1972 involvement, and because of their divisive nature, London maintained that all public order and security powers were 'reserved' matters which remained with Westminster as long as the emergency continued.[87] Given the British government's relatively clear idea of how the new institutions were supposed to work, the formation of the new executive was therefore not merely a question of whether Unionists and Nationalists would agree with each other, but – perhaps more importantly – if the leaders of the respective parties were prepared to accept the terms which London had pre-determined as an acceptable compromise. Faulkner's UUP, for example, insisted on the immediate return of the security powers, and rejected the notion of 'compulsory power-sharing' as well as the representation of Irish Nationalists in the new executive. The SDLP, on the other hand, demanded a thorough reform of policing and the end of internment without trial, none of which Westminster or the Unionists were prepared to concede. In fact, contrary to Patterson's assertion that 'a reformed police force was on offer',[88] Heath had made it clear that the continued professionalisation of the RUC along British lines – in combination with the SDLP's endorsement – would be sufficient to win back the trust of the minority in the security forces, and it was

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[86] Northern Ireland Office, 'The Future', pp. 35-7
[87] 'Northern Ireland Constitutional Proposals' (White Paper), Cmd. 5259 (London 1973), pp. 15-6
[88] H. Patterson, 'Trimble disarmed', *The Guardian*, 27 October 2001

consequently considered unnecessary to upset the majority community on this issue.[89]

The formation of the executive was a remarkable achievement. It was realised by making the constitutional, military, and economic instruments responsive to the political imperative of obtaining agreement between the parties, thus enabling London to grant tactical concessions depending on who needed most reassurance at any given point in time. This could be seen, for example, in the case of the Border Poll (see 4.1) or with regard to the release of internees (see 4.2). Also, the close co-ordination with Dublin meant that pressure could be brought to bear on the SDLP, which helped in overcoming the party's initial reluctance to negotiate with the British government.[90] In essence, the British government managed to secure agreement without having made any substantial concessions to either side. The SDLP gave way on internment and policing reform while Faulkner's UUP eventually agreed to power-sharing and the retention of security powers by Westminster. The Council of Ireland, with its commitment to 'executive and harmonising' functions represented a rhetorical gain for the Nationalists, although the unanimity rule in the Council of Ministers makes it difficult to see how the desired momentum towards a united Ireland should have developed in practice (see 4.1). On the whole, it was therefore neither Nationalists nor Unionists, but Westminster who emerged as the 'winner' from the negotiation process: with devolution, power-sharing, the Irish dimension, and the acceptance of the consent principle by Dublin and the SDLP, it had achieved the 'balanced settlement' for which it had strived.

Still, the 'moderate consensus' turned out to be fragile. Only three days after the Executive had taken office, on 4 January 1974, Faulkner was toppled as leader of the UUP. At the Westminster elections in February, the canddiates of the 'anti-Executive' United Ulster Unionist Council (UUUC) gained 11 out of 12 Northern Ireland seats (51.1 per cent of the vote); and three months after the poll, the Protestants joined in with the Loyalist strikers, forcing the

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[89] For Heath's ideas on police reform, see 'Mr Heath warns Ulster leaders', *The Times*, 30 August 1973

[90] Bew, *The British State*, pp. 52-3

British government to suspend the Executive. In the academic literature on the subject, the emergence of Unionist discontent is often explained with reference to institutional factors, such as the Irish dimension or the Executive's lack of security powers.[91] The focus on particular institutional features, however, fails to reflect the overarching and multifaceted influence of constitutional insecurity which determined the Protestant response to the new arrangement more than any one mechanism.

The perception on the part of many Protestants that the proposed form of devolution weakened rather than strengthened the Union was caused by the accumulation of several influences. First, it can indeed be explained with reference to some of the core provisions of the agreement, which stripped Stormont of its security powers (namely, the physical capability to defend the Union), demanded the incorporation of people who had openly declared their Nationalist credentials, and included the obligation to share some of the executive powers with the country whose territorial claim Stormont was meant to resist. Second, constitutional insecurity was increased by the structural asymmetry of London's political strategy which postulated neutrality towards the Unionists, yet allowed for 'secret talks' with PIRA as well as the closest possible co-ordination with Dublin. Third, constitutional insecurity was reinforced by mistakes in the micromanagement of the political process, such as Dublin's difficulties in bringing its most substantial concession, the recognition of Northern Ireland, in line with its Constitution; or Westminster's misleading description of the Irish dimension, in March 1973, as 'nothing more than an acknowledgement of the fact that Northern Ireland is affected in many ways by what happens in the Irish Republic and that the reverse is equally true',[92] which stood in marked contrast to the rhetorical monstrosity of the Council of Ireland. Lastly, despite the significant reduction in violence after Operation Motorman in August 1972 (see 4.2), the British government failed to reconstruct the basic connection between stability and physical

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[91] For an exploration of the different hypotheses, see Bew, *The British State*, pp. 65-6; P. Dixon, *Northern Ireland. The Politics of War and Peace* (Houndmills 2001), pp. 154-6; M. Farrell, *Northern Ireland. The Orange State* (London 1976), p. 311; B. O'Duffy, 'The Price of Containment: Deaths and Debate on Northern Ireland in the House of Commons 1968-94' in Catterall, *The Northern Ireland*, pp. 109-10; Workers' Association, *The Ulster General Strike* (Belfast 1977)

security against the background of continued paramilitary activity from both sides.[93]

Hence, rather than any singular influence, one could argue that it was the combination of all the factors outlined above which had made the Protestants believe that the Union was not safe under the proposed arrangement. This perception of constitutional instability determined the incentive structure of the majority community, and thus its response. As long as Stormont in its original form was not available, the Unionists would opt for the 'next best' arrangement from the perspective of constitutional security. Given that the new Executive was seen as the prelude to a sell-out, Direct Rule was clearly preferable. By offering the 'full integration' of Northern Ireland with Great Britain, Heath even provided an additional stimulus for the Protestants to oppose the new structures (see 4.1). In doing so, he illustrated London's failure to understand that Unionist attitudes towards any political settlement were not necessarily determined by the extent of self-government, but by the degree of constitutional security it offered.

Contrary to McGarry and O'Leary's claim that the Labour government had 'naively equated trade union action with "socialism"',[94] Westminster was fully aware of the political nature of the Loyalist strike. Orme, for example, had emphasised repeatedly that 'it had nothing to do with industrial politics or trade unionism'.[95] Equally, the notion of 'Ulster nationalism', which Rees developed in the wake of the stoppage, had little to do with leftwing ideology, but rather with the traditional idea that Ireland was 'different', and that London could not solve the 'Irish problem'. According to Rees:

> The Protestants began to mistrust British politicians. I just wondered, at the back of my mind, whether two sets of Nationalists – Catholic Nationalists and Protestant Ulster Nationalists – would be able to get together on purposes of government. Whether that could ever have happened, who knows, but they both thought the same way, that is,

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[92] 'The Facts: A Reasonable Deal For Ulster', NIO leaflet, March 1973
[93] H. Patterson, 'British Governments and the "Protestant Backlash", 1969-74' in Y. Alexander, A. O'Day (eds.), *Ireland's Terrorist Dilemma* (Dordrecht 1986), pp. 243-5
[94] B. O'Leary, J. McGarry, *The Politics of Antagonism. Understanding Northern Ireland*, 2nd edition, (London 1996), p. 218
[95] HC, Vol. 874, c. 1178, 4 June 1974

> Ulster is different from the rest. And I was not so sure whether the Catholic Nationalists really wanted a united Ireland, or whether they were more concerned about Ulster than about Ireland as a whole.[96]

Rees believed that the strike had shown how alienated the supposedly 'loyal' Protestants had become from British political culture and institutions, whereas the Catholics 'had learned the hard way from the Ulster Workers' strike, and [they were] ... aware that once the British troops were out, there would still be the Loyalists'.[97] In that sense, the British government assumed that the Loyalist strike had had a clearing, almost carthatic, impact on the ideological outlook of the political forces in the province. As Rees noted: 'The situation in Northern Ireland is both more fluid and much less clear-cut than has been the case for a long time. There is a different attitude in all sections of the community'.[98] The collapse of the constitutional arrangement thus offered the opportunity to exploit this 'new awareness'[99] and provide both Protestants and Catholics with the chance to discover a common identity. The so-called Constitutional Convention, which London proposed just five weeks after the end of the strike, was therefore based on the idea that the 'various groups in Northern Ireland... can best find for themselves political relationships which will be acceptable to them'.[100] London would revert to its initial role of a facilitator, which Rees believed it had clearly overstepped in the lead-up to the Executive. Equally, the influence of the Irish government was considered harmful to the prospect of developing the desired 'Ulster' identity (see 4.1). Since the Irish dimension had been watered down, power-sharing was the only substantial pre-condition for a return to devolution. Yet even power-sharing was put in less stringent terms than previously. Orme stated that it was a temporary measure, a 'bridging operation',[101] pending the development of a distinct 'Ulster' identity, which would allow people to overcome the sectarian divisions. Furthermore, it was believed that the 'new awareness' amongst the political forces in Northern Ireland could be used to broaden the political dialogue, encourage constitutional as well as

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[96] Lord Merlyn-Rees, interview with author, 6 March 2001
[97] Rees, p. 110
[98] Ibid, p. 174
[99] 'The Northern Ireland Constitution', Cmd. 5675 (London 1974), p. 19
[100] Ibid.
[101] HC, Vol. 874, c. 1182, 4 June 1974

paramilitary groups to talk to each other, and ensure that any new constitutional arrangement would be endorsed by concurring majorities within both communities rather than just one overall majority.

Regarding the paramilitaries, London hoped that the fluidity of the political situation had reignited their desire to engage in political activity. Also, given the Protestant paramilitaries' strong posture during the stoppage, the conversion of the 'men of violence' towards peaceful means, and their possible inclusion in a settlement, was now given more prominence. Accordingly, as early as July 1974, FitzGerald noted 'that Stan Orme seemed to be hoping for IRA agreement to a cease-fire'.[102] When PIRA announced a temporary cessation of its campaign in December 1974, Westminster was quick to embrace the opportunity to meet the Republican leadership in order to convince them of the potential merits of constitutional politics. The most noticeable sign of London's new approach towards the Republicans were the so-called 'incident centres' in Republican strongholds across the province. They were meant to provide an interface between PIRA and the government, so that any security 'incident' could be explained and the breakdown of the ceasefire prevented; yet they also gave the Republican movement a visible presence and could therefore be seen as an additional inducement to 'go political'. Likewise, in the first rounds of talks with the Republican leadership, London focused on advancing its idea of 'politicisation'. P. Taylor, who was granted access to Republican sources, quotes the proceedings of one typical meeting as follows:

> [The Provisionals] complained that 'the undertaking given regarding the movement of troops out of Ireland has not been fulfilled'... But [Michael] Oatley and [James] Allan [the British representatives] were more interested in trying to persuade Sinn Fein to take part in the elections for the Constitutional Convention... They said it was a sign that the government 'no longer wants to dictate events in Ireland and wants Irishmen themselves to "get on with it".[103]

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[102] FitzGerald, p. 247
[103] Meeting on 5 March 1975; Taylor, *Provos*, p. 187

Even if it was widely reported that *Sinn Fein* was 'likely to contest the Convention elections',[104] London's efforts came to nothing. Once it had become clear that the Republican 'doves' would not 'go political', Westminster's motivation in maintaining the ceasefire shifted towards the more pragmatic notion of buying time for the intended reorganisation of the military instrument (see 4.2). Like Whitelaw before him, Rees refused to acknowledge that the talks with PIRA had been a mistake: 'If it is considered necessary it will happen again'.[105]

Whitelaw's and Rees's strategies were similar in two respects. First, both of them overrated the degree to which Republicans were prepared to compromise on their ultimate aim, and secondly, neither Whitelaw nor Rees appreciated the importance of constitutional stability. Rees, like many observers of the conflict, recognised the devastating impact of the Council of Ireland on Unionist support for the Executive, but he failed to understand the underlying reason. Although he played down one source of constitutional instability, the Irish dimension, he created constitutional insecurity on an even greater scale by talking about 'disengagement' with PIRA, announcing the withdrawal of troops as part of the Normalisation policy (see 4.2), and failing to give clear constitutional commitments as part of the self-imposed restraint with regard to the Constitutional Convention. He developed the notion of 'Ulster nationalism' as yet another British attempt at circumventing the basic fault line in Northern Ireland society. Contrary to Rees' hopes, though, the Loyalist sense of Britishness was as strong as ever, and the supposed alienation from the British government did not translate into the common identity he sought to project. In fact, the idea of 'Ulster nationalism' was more a reflection of London's alienation from Northern Ireland than vice versa. Unsurprisingly, the talks between the SDLP and the biggest Loyalist paramilitary organisation, the Ulster Defence Association (UDA), failed because the SDLP had no intention of dropping its all-Ireland aspiration; and the only two Protestant politicians who bought into the myth of 'Ulster nationalism', William Craig of Vanguard and the strike leader Harry Murray,

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[104] 'Rift among ranks of the IRA about continuation of Ulster ceasefire', *The Times*, 24 February 1975; see M. Holland, 'Is the Peace Over?', *New Statesman*, 11 April 1975, p. 474
[105] Rees, quoted in FitzGerald, p. 278

were ousted by their grassroots after they appeared willing to compromise with the Nationalists.[106] In short, under the given circumstances of constitutional turmoil, the majority community was not prepared to consider the inclusion of Nationalists in a devolved settlement. Consequently, the Constitutional Convention produced no agreement on power-sharing, and its final report (which recommended a return to the 'old' Stormont system of government with majority rule) was therefore rejected by Westminster. The lack of remaining options determined the decision to continue with an extended period of Direct Rule (see 4.1).

4.4 The end of prosperity – 'Tory socialism' and cautious reforms

Despite the changes in the government's overall strategy, London's commitment to raise the prosperity of the province as a whole and achieve economic and social parity with Great Britain was undiminished under Direct Rule. British thinking on the use of the economic instrument continued to be guided by the assumption that there was a direct link between peace and prosperity. As Howell put it:

> The view that Ted Heath gave to me when he appointed me [in 1972] was that if we went into Ireland and organised effectively social improvement, new housing estates, new roads, new transport, clearances of slum areas, and brought in new jobs, attracted new industry from all over Europe and elsewhere, we would uplift the general social structure and living standards, and this would have some immediate ameliorating effect on the violence.[107]

From an ideological perspective, the willingness to engage in resolute state action to 'uplift the social structure' was typically Labour. Yet, even the Conservatives adhered to this belief where Northern Ireland was concerned. As a result, basic Conservative philosophy of non-intervention in British industry was consistently at odds with London's actions in Northern Ireland. As early as June 1972, for example, Howell announced that the government

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[106] For an assessment of the SDLP-UDA talks and the case of Harry Murray, see R. Knox, 'Meeting is such fleet sorrow', *The Spectator*, 10 August 1974, p. 173

[107] Lord Howell, interview with author, 6 March 2001

would take over an ailing factory in Castlereagh (Co. Antrim). Writing in the *Times*, the journalist R.W. Shakespeare pointed out:

> Perhaps only in the melancholy circumstances of Northern Ireland is it conceivable that a Conservative government could find itself buying its way into a company which while owning a plant and employing a labour force, is still searching for an economic product. Nevertheless, Mr Howell says that he does not personally rule out the possibility of similar involvements should they prove to be necessary. He said "I believe we must be ready to use whatever methods are most appropriate in order to prevent the further rundown of industry and loss of employment".[108]

Although the government emphasised that the long term solution for the economic problems in the province lay in additional private investment, London conceded that the state had to assume the role of the private sector as long as unemployment remained high. In that sense, the direct labour organisation Enterprise Ulster (set up in 1973) was another instance of 'Tory socialism'. The primary purpose of Enterprise Ulster was to create employment in any area that could be of value to the community, ranging from the building of car parks to the construction of playgrounds. Committing the 'original sin' from the perspective of doctrinaire economic Conservatism, Peter Mills, a Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State at the NIO, hoped that the state body would develop into 'a large employer operating throughout the province'.[109] In general, the government continued with the expansion of the public service sector, both as a means of creating employment and in order to achieve social parity with the rest of the United Kingdom.[110]

Neither the Conservative nor the Labour government made use of economic sanctions as a means of coercing good behaviour, even if both administrations regularly stressed the size of Westminster's subvention to Northern Ireland and threatened to withdraw some of the money if the province failed to comply with London's political plans. After the Loyalist strike, for example, Wilson stated that 'it is inconceivable that our people on this side of the water – our constituents – will accept without question... to

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[108] R.W. Shakespeare, 'NI is still very much in business', *The Times*, 29 June 1972
[109] HC, Vol. 859, c. 915, 6 July 1973

meet the cost of these... politically inspired, self-inflicted wounds'.[111] On the one hand, the public statements about the financial contribution of the British government were aimed at neutralising the idea of an independent Northern Ireland and concentrating the minds of the local political leaders on bringing about power-sharing in a devolved settlement. Heath declared, accordingly, that 'the British government would not pay one penny... to an independent country'.[112] Likewise, the 1974 Green Paper on 'Finance and the economy', which focused heavily on the financial support the province received from the Treasury, attempted to convey to the Loyalists that independence could not be realised. As Rees explained:

> It's a fact of life that if you want Northern Ireland to be independent, you have to supplement it with money. They don't have any. It's a poor country. So they would need money. We were reminding them of the financial contribution as a deliberate policy.[113]

On the other hand, the verbal emphasis on London's subvention was an exercise in populism, voicing the perceived anger of many people in Great Britain at the 'unreasonableness' of Northern Ireland. Wilson admitted that his television speech at the height of the Loyalist strike, in which he labelled the people of Northern Ireland 'spongers', was primarily meant for an audience on the British mainland: 'The idea I was seeking to get across was that Ulster was always ready to come to auntie for spending money, expressing their thanks by kicking her in the teeth'.[114] His strong rhetorical postures, however, were not followed by any actions. Although an additional grant for Harland and Wolff was put on hold for some days after the strike, the government readily agreed to provide the money as soon as it became clear that the shipyard was threatened with closure. Twelve months later, the company, which saw some of the most vociferous opposition to the 1974 Executive, was promised another massive injection of financial support over the coming

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[110] Rowthorn, pp. 85-7
[111] HC, Vol. 874, c. 1047, 4 June 1974
[112] Heath, quoted in R. Fisk, 'Threat to stop £200m aid if UK tie is cut', *The Times*, 17 November 1972
[113] Lord Merlyn-Rees, interview with author, 6 March 2001
[114] Wilson, *Final Term*, p. 77

five years (£119m in grants and loans, compared to £31.5m for the 1971-74 period).[115]

As in the 1969-72 period, London's economic strategy focused on raising the living conditions in the province as a whole. Despite the fact that the measures which had been introduced before the abolition of Stormont had clearly failed to make any impact on employment practices in the province, the level of economic inequality between the two communities was given less attention. By mid-1972, the Commissioner for Complaints had only established a single case of discrimination on sectarian grounds.[116] The most striking example remained Harland & Wolff, where the complete failure to increase the number of Catholic workers was now justified by pointing to the fact that 'there are many thousands of others... doing subcontract work for Harland and Wolff, and these workers are representative of both communities'.[117] However, the more fundamental flaw with London's approach towards economic inequality lay in the assumption that material differences would disappear once additional investment from abroad had been secured. In spite of financial incentives and several advertisement campaigns, the British government only managed to attract a total of 900 jobs from outside Northern Ireland between 1972 and 1976.[118] As a result of the oil crisis, the ensuing recession, and further decline in manufacturing as well as agriculture, unemployment began to rise from 1973, with 11 per cent reaching a post-war record in early 1976. Consequently, the government's attention needed to shift from creating new jobs towards maintaining the existing level of employment, so that the idea of eliminating relative deprivation by achieving 'prosperity for everyone' became increasingly untenable.

It is notable that the issue of economic inequality was not yet high on the agenda of the Nationalists either. When Unionists, Alliance and the SDLP worked out the political programme of the future Executive, economic and

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[115] Orme; HC, Vol. 894, c. 2475, 1 August 1975; for the pre-1974 figures, see HC, Vol. 930, c. 57, 19 April 1977
[116] NIO minister Paul Channon; HC, Vol. 836, c. 178, 4 May 1972
[117] Orme; HC, Vol. 894, c. 2481, 1 August 1975
[118] Rowthorn, p. 84

social policy was regarded as the least contentious area. Whilst the problem of relative deprivation between the two communities was hardly raised, the SDLP even showed some understanding of Unionist fears by accepting the principle that priority should be given to Northern Ireland people in allocating job vacancies.[119] The only actor to articulate the issue of inequality coherently was the Irish government. Yet, in FitzGerald's words, 'there was such an evident reluctance [on behalf of the British government] to embark on a programme [of positive discrimination] ... that I did not take very seriously Willie Whitelaw's offer... to see what could be done'.[120] To some extent, this unwillingness was due to London's awareness that any serious challenge to the economic and social status quo would provoke an adverse reaction within the majority community, thus jeopardising the careful political equilibrium the government had to bring about in order to achieve agreement on a political settlement. Howell admits that his government's lack of determination to 'plunge ahead with anti-discrimination measures' was influenced by the amount of 'offence' they would cause amongst Protestants.[121] In a similar vein, Heath principally agreed with FitzGerald that the sectarian imbalance in the civil service had to corrected, yet he insisted that it needed to be done 'discreetly'.[122] On the other hand, the idea of 'collective rights' was at odds with the British notion of individual opportunity, and Whitelaw accordingly rejected the suggestion that the promotion of Catholics in the civil service should be speeded up. He remarked that 'merit could not be set aside, as efficiency was the criterion for a good civil service'.[123]

London's reluctance *vis-à-vis* economic inequality was reflected in the restricted nature of Westminster's initiatives. In August 1972, London set up a working party to examine the problem of job discrimination in the private sector. The committee endorsed a 'voluntary' approach to 'affirmative action' (defined by the working party as 'deliberate programmes under which equality of employment opportunity may be achieved'), but it rejected the

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[119] Faulkner, pp. 206, 214
[120] FitzGerald, p. 201
[121] Lord Howell, interview with author, 6 March 2001
[122] FitzGerald, p. 203
[123] Whitelaw, quoted in Faulkner, p. 212

introduction of quotas or 'benign [that is, positive] discrimination'. It asked for employers and trade unions at every workplace to sign a 'declaration of principle and intent' and demanded the establishment of an agency to investigate individual complaints as well as to conduct research.[124] Moreover, the newly established Standing Advisory Commission on Human Rights (SACHR) would monitor the economic situation in the province and produce annual reports which were to include recommendations on further legislation. In addition, discrimination on religious (or sectarian) grounds was outlawed in the Northern Ireland Constitution Act (1973) and the Fair Employment Act (1976). The number of initiatives, however, could not conceal that London's approach continued to focus on individual cases of discrimination. When it came to the wider issue of economic and social inequality between the two communities, Westminster's proposals remained vague and relied on the goodwill of employers and trade unions (such as the shop stewards at Harland & Wolff, who could hardly be expected to go against their colleagues and insist on hiring more Catholics).

Apart from the well-publicised initiatives, the British government implemented a series of policies that could be regarded as evidence of Westminster's 'discreet' approach towards economic inequality. For example, London believed that Catholics often failed to gain access to skilled jobs because their level of education was thought to be lower than the Protestants'. Orme asserted that 'Catholics could not be given skilled jobs for which they had not been properly trained'.[125] The government's emphasis on job training was, therefore, a means of equalising employment opportunities. (By 1973, there were nine times as many job training centres per head of population as in Great Britain.)[126] In a similar vein, Westminster attempted to locate new ventures in predominantly Catholic areas. Howell observed that Catholics and Protestants were living in 'self-contained communities', and that 'a more even distribution of economic activity' between the two communities could be achieved by bringing employment closer to Catholic areas, such as West

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[124] See 'Report and Recommendations of the Working Party on Discrimination in the Private Sector of Employment' (Van Straubenzee Report), (Belfast 1973)
[125] Orme, quoted in Rees, p. 288
[126] HC, Vol. 848, c. 601, 14 December 1972

Belfast or the western counties of Northern Ireland.[127] Significantly, the recognition of Catholic employment needs signalled a move away from the growth-centre strategy of the Stormont administration which prioritised predominantly Protestant towns, such as Lurgan or Portadown (see 3.4). It is doubtful, however, whether these initiatives produced any tangible results, particularly since they depended on the influx of investment and the provision of additional jobs. When compared to the seemingly unlimited cash injections for Harland and Wolff, and the failure to see the massive expansion of the public service sector as an opportunity to redress sectarian imbalances, London's approach appears very cautious indeed.

4.5 Conclusion

No other period in almost three decades of British involvement has seen as much activism on behalf of the British government as the years between 1972 and 1975. Still, despite the frenzy of initatives and new policies, the period ended as it had begun, with the direct rule of the province from London.

The British government regarded the abolition of Stormont in March 1972 as a temporary measure. Westminster's aim remained unchanged: it was to make sure that Northern Ireland would remain 'a place apart', and that the political conflict in the troubled province would cease to impinge upon life and politics on the British mainland. To this end, devolution was still considered the best arrangement, yet London had learned that self-government needed to be supplemented by a cross-community coalition to reflect the sectarian divisions in Northern Ireland society and provide the minority with a permanent share in power. In order to achieve the objective of a devolved power-sharing government, the strategic instrument was employed as follows:

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[127] HC, Vol. 853, c. 1441, 29 March 1973

- the constitutional instrument, to reaffirm the consent principle whilst establishing institutions to express the existence of an Irish dimension.
- the military instrument, to facilitate political progress whilst fighting the paramilitaries.
- the political instrument, to 'draw up a band of moderates' from both communities who would share power in a coalition government.
- the economic instrument, to 'uplift the social structure' by sustaining growth and creating employment.

Crucially, Westminster assumed that the majority community wanted the return to devolution as much as the British government, and that the Protestants were prepared to pay the price in the form of power-sharing and the Council of Ireland in order to get Stormont back. The supposed harmony of interests with regard to devolution, however, was a fatal error of judgement. Whereas for the British government devolution was an end in itself (it guaranteed that Northern Ireland could be re-insulated from Great Britain), the Protestants primarily sought constitutional stability, that is, an arrangement that made the Union safe and prevented the incorporation of the province into a united Ireland. The 'old' Stormont represented a bulwark against Irish expansionism, yet the 'new' Stormont seemed more like the prelude to a sell-out. The feeling of constitutional insecurity was caused by particular features of the proposed arrangement, such as power-sharing and the Irish dimension, but it was further aggravated by the political environment, with structural imbalances towards the Nationalists, grave mistakes in the micromanagement of the political process, and the background of continuing violence.

Even after the breakdown of the Executive in May 1974, Westminster failed to understand that the main lesson from the collapse of the 'old ' Stormont, the need to include members of the minority community in the government of the province, could only be realised if the majority was convinced that power-sharing would not entail a threat to the constitutional status of Northern Ireland, that is, if the British government provided a stable political environment. Instead, London developed the notion of 'Ulster nationalism'.

Again, the objective was devolution with power-sharing, and the strategic instrument was re-arranged as follows:

- the constitutional instrument, to play down the Irish dimension and focus on a devolved settlement within Northern Ireland.
- the military instrument, to 'normalise' the security situation by phasing out emergency arrangements and returning to the primacy of the police in law enforcement.
- the political instrument, to facilitate communication between all political actors, aiming at the re-establishment of a cross-community government.
- the economic instrument, to preserve employment.

'Ulster nationalism' was a pipedream that resulted from London's misapprehension of the Loyalist strike as an expression of Protestant alienation from Britain. Like the 1974 Executive, the Constitutional Convention failed to agree on power-sharing because its proceedings were accompanied by constitutional turmoil. By now, however, the main source of instability were changes in the use of the military instrument. The military policy of Normalisation aimed at making the British engagement in Northern Ireland more sustainable by re-establishing the security forces' legitimacy and minimising the loss of troops from the mainland. In practice, though, the introduction of Normalisation – with the reduction of British troops, the release of detainees and the need to sustain the PIRA ceasefire – appeared to indicate British withdrawal. Only with the failure of the latter did London begin to realise that whilst the division of society made it necessary to provide the minority with a share in power, the majority needed constitutional security to grant it – an insight which provided the intellectual foundation of London's strategy in the following period.

5 Going it alone? Direct Rule under pressure, 1976-82

Recognising its previous failure to create the perception of constitutional security, the British government opted for a continued period of undiminished Direct Rule, accompanied by the strongest affirmation yet of London's will to govern the province. Less than six years later, though, the assumption of absolute British sovereignty over Northern Ireland had become unviable, and Dublin was now 'included in'.[1]

In this chapter, it is argued that – while devolution and power-sharing remained long-term aspirations – the notion of stability became the interim objective of the British government. London conceptualised stability as an effort to improve the security situation and achieving economic progress whilst providing a durable constitutional and political framework with Direct Rule. The idea of generating stability through Direct Rule, however, was based on a series of assumptions, the challenges to which were to defeat its original purpose. In fact, the practical effects of London's strategy were both destabilising and polarising: external pressures forced Westminster to dilute its constitutional approach; the contradictions of Normalisation created a rift between the British government and the minority community; the disregard for local political activity pushed the Nationalists into intransigence; and adverse circumstances as well as the inherent constraints of London's strategic tradition meant that tangible improvements in relation to security and the economy could not be achieved. By the time of the second hunger strike of Republican prisoners in 1981, an internal settlement – devolution and power-sharing – had therefore become impractical, and Westminster embarked on a re-formulation of its strategy. It was realised that internal constraints as well as external pressures meant that Northern Ireland could not any longer be treated as a purely domestic matter, and that any new approach needed to take this fundamental change into account.

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[1] F. Emery, 'Taking a new turn in the Irish maze', *The Times*, 13 December 1980

5.1 Exposed? The fragility of Direct Rule

Many authors have regarded the adoption of Direct Rule on a permanent basis as a sign of resignation. Boyce, for example, stated that it 'reflected the British inability to devise new policies, and their understandable desire to let well enough alone'.[2] Whilst this assessment is true in that London considered Direct Rule as the only remaining alternative within the parameters of the British constitutional tradition after two attempts at producing a devolved settlement had failed (see 4.1), it would be mistaken to imply that Westminster's intention to forgo constitutional initiatives signified inactivity, the lack of a strategy, or that it indicated the abandonment of Westminster's objective of devolution with power-sharing. In London's view, the new constitutional approach aimed at providing stability so that constitutional progress towards devolution would become more likely at some – yet undefined – point in the future. Roy Mason, Rees' successor as Northern Ireland Secretary, declared that '[i]f progress was to be made, it had to start on the basis of stability. That... meant reducing the level of terrorism.. [and] somehow reviving the economy of Northern Ireland'.[3] The belief in stability, however, also required that 'the whole issue of constitutional change [was] put on the back burner'.[4]

The new approach represented an inherently plausible aberration from traditional British thinking on the use of the constitutional instrument. For the first time, London had acknowledged that the conflict could not be resolved, or contained, in the short term, and that the government had to move beyond the 'institutionalism' of the 1972-75 period in order to create the conditions under which its objectives could be realised. Whilst in 1972 the introduction of Direct Rule was seen as a temporary measure that would enable London to oversee the swift return to devolution, Westminster had now accepted that – for the foreseeable future – it had to exercise its responsibility by governing

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[2] D.G. Boyce, *The Irish Question*, p. 123
[3] R. Mason, *Paying the Price* (London 1999), p. 218
[4] Ibid., p. 161

the province, and it was fiercely determined to make a strong case for it. As Mason declared:

> Direct rule... is positive in that we are doing everything possible to improve the standard of life here; it is compassionate in that it takes account of the wishes of the people here and does everything possible to meet them; and it cares in that it is making every effort to get Northern Ireland back to normality.[5]

In itself, the idea of 'positive' and 'caring' Direct Rule as a means of producing stability was a perfectly logical conclusion from past failures to bring about power-sharing and devolution. In practice, however, it rested on a series of assumptions: first, it presumed that London was capable of delivering tangible improvements in security and the economy; second, it assumed that Direct Rule was equally acceptable to both communities, and that Protestants as well as Catholics were prepared to acquiesce in London's claim to be an impartial and honest broker; third, it postulated that Northern Ireland was a matter for the United Kingdom alone, and that no other actor had a stake in the conflict. In strategic terms, Westminster had thus presupposed an ideal game situation, namely one in which all other actors strictly adhered to London's assumptions about the nature of the conflict, and one in which other actors' moves would not impact upon the implementation of London's strategy. As it turned out, though, the strategy of the British government was challenged both by adverse circumstances and the interference of actors from within and outside the province.

The military, political and economic pressures that interfered with the implementation of London's strategy are described in the following sections of this chapter. With regard to the assumption that Northern Ireland was a matter for the United Kingdom government alone, the most significant challenge to London's strategy emanated from the government of the Republic of Ireland. In contrast to the widespread perception that the conflicting aspiration of the two communities in Northern Ireland meant that

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[5] Mason, quoted in 'Mr Mason cites benefits of direct rule in province', *The Times*, 14 September 1977

relations between London and Dublin were bound to be poor,[6] there was a high degree of congruence between the two governments prior to the establishment of the 1974 Executive, when both agreed on the objective of devolution, power-sharing and the Irish dimension. In the following years, Westminster's *de facto* abandonment of the Irish dimension and the secret talks with PIRA provoked some misgivings, yet Dublin avoided open conflict as London continued to pursue a power-sharing settlement.[7] With the adoption of Direct Rule on a quasi-permanent basis, however, the consensus between the two governments broke down. Whilst the position of the British government had changed, the objective of the Irish government remained the same: it wanted the British government to launch yet another political initiative that would seek to bring about devolution and power-sharing as well as incorporate some form of Irish dimension. As in previous years, Dublin's approach rested on the consent principle, and all the Irish Prime Ministers during the 1976-82 period reaffirmed that the unification of Ireland could only come about 'by agreement and in harmony between the two islands'.[8] In addition, Jack Lynch and (in particular) Charles Haughey, who were leaders of the more Nationalist *Fianna Faíl* party, now urged the British government to become a 'persuader of Irish unity', to abandon its neutral stance with regard to the future of Northern Ireland and encourage the Protestants to join a united Ireland.[9]

In order to advance its objective, the Irish government attempted to create a complex bargaining situation *vis-à-vis* the British government. Its bargaining power resulted from three sources. First, as its pronouncements carried some weight with the Nationalist minority in Northern Ireland, Dublin was capable of undermining London's strategy directly – especially when it came to London's military policy of Normalisation (see 5.2). For instance, the Irish government insisted on pursuing a case at the European Court of Human Rights which accused the British government of using torture during the

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[6] See, for example, P. Arthur, K. Jeffery, *Northern Ireland since 1968,* 2nd edition (Oxford 1996), p. 17
[7] FitzGerald, p. 247
[8] Irish Prime Minister Charles Haughey, quoted in M. Holland, 'A man who will not be patronised', *New Statesman*, 14 December 1979, p. 926
[9] See, for example, 'Mr Lynch puts on the pressure', *The Times*, 8 February 1978

introduction of internment without trial in August 1971 (see 3.2). Although the court rejected Dublin's claim,[10] the British government regarded the drawn-out proceedings as a protracted attempt to weaken its legitimacy.[11] Moreover, the Irish government continued to resist calls for an effective agreement on the extradition of suspects whose actions were 'politically motivated', thus providing them with the legitimacy the British government sought to deny. In an interview on Irish radio, Lynch even considered 'some form of amnesty for IRA men' who were serving sentences in the Republic of Ireland.[12] The fact that Westminster believed it to be 'of absolutely critical importance to Britain that Mr Haughey should not be supporting'[13] the hunger strikes of Republican prisoners (in 1980 and 1981) can be seen as an explicit acknowledgement of Dublin's capability to thwart London's strategy.

The second source of Dublin's bargaining power related to the existence of a land border between the Republic and Northern Ireland, and the significance which London attached to co-operating with the Irish government in security matters. According to Callaghan, Wilson's successor as Prime Minister, Dublin failed to take 'sufficiently serious the vital need for close border cooperation if the IRA threat was to be contained'.[14] In a similar vein, Thatcher (who followed Callaghan in 1979) thought that '[t]he border... is of crucial significance to the security problem. Much depends on the willingness and ability of the political leaders of the Republic to co-operate effectively with our intelligence, security forces and courts'.[15] The Irish government, on the other hand, maintained that the British government exaggerated the problem, and it protested strongly when members of the British government accused it of being a 'safe haven' for members of PIRA.[16] Even so, there clearly was an element of discretion when it came to issues like extradition, direct contact between the armed forces of both countries, border crossings, overflights etc., on which Dublin appeared to co-operate only when London

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[10] The British government was found guilty of 'degrading' and 'inhuman' treatment which, according to the Court, did *not* amount to torture; see K. Kyle, 'Ireland v. the UK: Europe's decision', *The Listener*, 26 January 1978, p. 101
[11] See Rees, p. 308
[12] 'Lynch lunges out', *The Economist*, 14 January 1978, p. 12
[13] F. Emery, 'Taking a new turn in the Irish maze', *The Times*, 13 December 1980
[14] J. Callaghan, *Time and Chance* (London 1987), p. 499
[15] Thatcher, p. 385

offered political concessions. Accordingly, Raymond Carter, who was a junior minister under Rees and Mason, described Anglo-Irish relations in the late 1970s as follows:

> [T]he Irish are capable of behaving in a way where their views are contradictory. On the one hand, they want to see peace and stability. On the other hand, they always want to extract something extra from the bargaining process which, at times, is in conflict with the bigger objective... [W]e didn't have many difficulties, except on security where we clearly had problems.[17]

Thatcher appeared to share this view: '[T]he need for greater security... meant making limited political concession to the South, much as I disliked this kind of bargaining'.[18]

Third, as a means of exerting pressure on London, and in order to limit Republican influence overseas, the Irish government attempted to mobilise elite opinion in the United States of America. The aim was to produce what could be described as a 'soft Nationalist consensus' amongst leading American politicians in order to condemn PIRA's campaign whilst advocating a new political initiative to bring about power-sharing and – in the long term – a united Ireland by consent.[19] The Irish government's main allies in the USA were four leading Irish-American politicians, the so-called Four Horsemen, whose annual St Patrick's Day statements were close reflections of Irish government policy.[20] In 1977, they persuaded US President Jimmy Carter to adopt a declaration which called for a new political initiative and offered economic aid in return. According to the *Economist*, the draft plan was 'conceived in Dublin and [then] ... sent first to the State Department and then to the White House'.[21]

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[16] See C. Walker, 'Dublin contempt for British allegations', *The Times,* 10 March 1978
[17] Raymond Carter, interview with author, 30 July 2001
[18] Thatcher, p. 385
[19] According to Haughey, it was 'better to try to unite Irish-American opinion behind the policy of the Irish government than to excommunicate those who sympathised in varying degrees with armed struggle in the North'; Haughey, quoted in M. Mansergh, 'The background to the Irish peace process' in Cox, *A Farewell*, p. 15
[20] See 'Candid friends', *The Economist*, 24 March 1979, p. 48
[21] 'A leaking kettle may not boil', *The Economist*, 27 August 1977, p. 43

Whilst the emergence of an 'American dimension' cannot be denied, it is nonetheless difficult to determine the extent to which American – and in particular US government – pressure can be isolated as an influence on the formulation of British government policy. Overall, there was no inclination on behalf of the US government to jeopardise Anglo-American relations.[22] Hence, in contrast to A. Guelke's suggestion that the Carter statement had made the conflict in Northern Ireland 'a legitimate concern of American foreign policy',[23] Washington's treatment of the issue in the 1976-82 period remained irresolute and inconsistent. After the Carter statement, the US government refrained from any major interventions for almost two years. In July 1979, the US State Department imposed a ban on handgun sales to the RUC, yet only five weeks later, the Secretary of State, Cyrus Vance, emphasised that Northern Ireland was a domestic matter, and that it was 'not wise' for the US government to interfere with London's handling of the Irish Question.[24] With Ronald Reagan's election victory in 1980, Washington's interest declined almost completely, and FitzGerald's attempts at getting the US government involved in the resolution of the hunger strikes failed, not least because Reagan 'did not show a great deal of close understanding of the problem', as even FitzGerald admits.[25] On the British side, the American dimension of the conflict was recognised as a new factor that needed to be taken into account. Even so, there is little evidence that it was perceived as overwhelming, or that American pressure became the one 'key element' in the process of formulating British government policy, as A.J. Wilson claims.[26] In general, London welcomed the activities of the Four Horsemen in promoting inward investment and discouraging Irish-Americans from giving money to Republican organisations as 'exceedingly helpful',[27] but it believed that there was 'an unfortunate tendency [in the USA] to offer advice from [a] rather shaky base'.[28] Westminster's only direct response to American pressure was, therefore, to improve public relations, and to pay 'constant

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[22] See J. Dumbrell, '"Hope and history": the US and peace in Northern Ireland' in Cox, *A Farewell*, p. 215
[23] A. Guelke, *Northern Ireland: the international perspective* (Dublin 1988), p. 137
[24] 'US "is neutral on Ulster"', *Daily Telegraph*, 6 September 1979
[25] FitzGerald, p. 372
[26] A.J. Wilson, *Irish America and the Ulster Conflict, 1968-95* (Belfast 1995), pp. 162-4
[27] Lord Orme, interview with author, 21 August 2001
[28] Northern Ireland Secretary Humphrey Atkins; HC, Vol. 972, c. 618, 25 October 1979

attention to foreign policy aimed at explaining the facts to the misinformed'.[29] At the same time, there can be no doubt London regarded the internationalisation of the conflict as an irritant; it represented another challenge to the assumption that the conflict was a domestic issue, and it added to the destabilising effects of Direct Rule.

Hence, how did London cope with the external pressure that had been created by the Irish government and its allies? As shown above, the absence of constitutional initiatives was central to London's idea of creating stability. Whilst reaffirming the objective of devolution and 'partnership' (or power-sharing) government, Mason declared that any initiative to that end would be 'very dangerous, especially if it led people to believe that there was hope and then we plunged them back in the depths of despair'.[30] On the other hand, the assumption of full responsibility for the government of Northern Ireland had made the British government vulnerable: with slow improvements in the security situation (see 5.2), the increasingly partisan perception of Direct Rule within the Catholic community (see 5.3), and growing difficulties in the economic sector (see 5.4), London was exposed to the external pressures which had challenged the idea that the British government was capable of containing the conflict. The result was a process of gradual dilution, which led to the admission that the conflict could not be contained as a purely domestic problem.

The first wave of responses to the external challenge attempted to reconcile the demand for a fresh initiative with the requirement of constitutional stability. They were half-hearted efforts to ease the pressure from outside, and to extract a more co-operative attitude from the Irish government. In mid-September 1977, for example, Mason had firmly ruled out the possibility of another initiative, stating that 'the old differences on the form of devolution still arise... There is at present no basis for agreement on the need for an interim step'.[31] On 21 November, however, he told the House of Commons

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[29] Thatcher, p. 384
[30] HC, Vol. 935, c. 1829, 21 July 1977
[31] Mason, quoted in C. Walker, 'Mr Mason rules out devolution in Ulster', *The Times*, 14 September 1977

that he intended to enter into talks with the political parties in the province 'to see whether it might be feasible to reach agreement on some form of partial devolution as an interim step', and he sent a letter to the party leaders in which he outlined the measures that would result in the gradual return to devolved government.[32] Although there is no 'hard evidence' to account for Mason's sudden change of mind, the absence of any significant political developments in the weeks between the two events makes it reasonable to conclude that the reversal was the result of Dublin's intervention: on 28 September, the British and Irish Prime Ministers met at Downing Street, and whilst Lynch pressed for the launch of another constitutional initiative, Callaghan had tried to persuade Lynch of the need for more co-operation on border security.[33] The same logic applied to the so-called Constitutional Conference. In May 1979, Mason's successor, Humphrey Atkins, had declared that '[a]s regards political initiatives... I do not think that it would be right for me to take any immediate precipitate action'.[34] By October, little had happened that would have made any initiative more likely to succeed, yet again, external pressures had become a major factor in the formulation of British government policy. With the handgun sales ban in July, the US government had carried out its most hostile intervention to date. According to Thatcher, it was an 'absurd situation' which required increased efforts on behalf of London to enlighten public opinion across the Atlantic.[35] Equally important, though, were the events on 27 August, when PIRA first assassinated Lord Mountbatten in the Republic of Ireland, and then killed 18 British soldiers in Warrenpoint, Co. Down. In Thatcher's view, the two incidents highlighted how central border co-operation was to improving the security situation.[36] Accordingly, the *Daily Telegraph* suggested that 'Mrs Thatcher could give Mr Lynch a fillip by agreeing that another round of political talks in Ulster should be tried',[37] and indeed in October, Atkins invited the local parties to participate in the Constitutional Conference (see 5.3).

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[32] HC, Vol. 939, c. 1726, 24 November 1977; for the full text of the letter, see HC, Vol. 941, cc. 1839-40, 12 January 1978
[33] Callaghan, *Time*, p. 499
[34] HC, Vol. 967, c. 1205, 24 May 1979
[35] Thatcher, p. 58
[36] Ibid., p. 57
[37] J. Wightman, 'What Mr Lynch says and what Mr Lynch does', *Daily Telegraph*, 4 September 1979

The turn towards the inter-governmental approach of the subsequent years followed the end of the second hunger strike in 1981. The first series of high-profile summits between the British and Irish Prime Ministers in 1980 and 1981 implied no significant change of strategy. Whilst the Irish government had begun to pursue the idea of an inter-governmental accord in early 1980, the British government continued to maintain the conventional approach, which translated into limiting Dublin's disruptive potential and extracting concessions on security.[38] Even Haughey, who spoke of an 'historic breakthrough' after the Anglo-Irish summit in Dublin on 8 December 1980, admitted to his Cabinet that '[w]hat's been going on is nothing'.[39] London's first response to the 1981 hunger strike was, therefore, entirely consistent with its earlier attempts at containing external pressures: it launched another constitutional initiative, aiming at an internal settlement. This time, however, the proposed scheme (which became known as 'rolling devolution') would appease neither the Irish government nor the SDLP, both of which were terrified at the degree of Catholic support for the hunger strikers and the possible rise of *Sinn Fein* as an electoral force (see 5.3, 6.3). As a result, the momentum towards a re-formulation of London's strategy became overwhelming, and the hitherto uneasy relationship with Dublin would be embraced as a suitable framework for a new departure.

5.2 'Beating the terrorists'? The contradictions of Normalisation

According to D. McVea and McKittrick, the late-1970s represented an attempt to impose 'a military solution without a political solution'.[40] In a similar vein, Hamill asserts that there was 'no more nonsense about political progress' once Mason had taken over as Northern Ireland Secretary in September 1976.[41] Indeed, most conventional accounts of security policy in

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[38] See, for example, G. Clark, 'Reassurance on talks with Mr Haughey', *The Times*, 6 March 1981

[39] Haughey, quoted in J. Joyce, P. Murtagh, *The Boss. Charles J. Haughey in Government* (Dublin 1983), p. 150

[40] McKittrick, *Making Sense*, p. 129

[41] D. Hamill, *Pig in the Middle. The Army in Northern Ireland, 1969-84* (London 1985), p. 199

the Mason period are misleading in that they suggest that the absence of any constitutional or political initiatives meant that the security forces were now freed from all constraints. In fact, the parameters of the British government's military tradition applied in the late-1970s as much as in any other period since the fall of Stormont in 1972. First, Westminster justified its counterinsurgency effort in Northern Ireland with reference to the existence of what it saw as an anti-democratic challenge to the rule of law, and the military instrument could therefore not be executed in a way that would have defeated this purpose. As Mason stated: 'A democracy functions by the will of the people and through the rule of law. It cannot behave like a totalitarian state, nor is it right that it should'.[42] Second, the British government was fully aware that 'tough' security measures would alienate the minority community, help the insurgents to gain popular support, and make a political settlement in the future less likely. Mason declared:

> There is nothing the terrorist would like to see more than for the government to introduce... punishment without trial, punishment for political beliefs and affiliations, and blanket reductions in civil rights. The resentment that these measures would arouse would make the security problem far worse than it is today and prolong it further into the future.[43]

Third, the military policy of Normalisation rested on the assumption that the gradual return to 'normal' law enforcement was conducive to stability. It was irreconcilable with demands for an increased profile of the Army, or any new measures of an overtly repressive nature.

Hence, there continued to be clear limits on what could be done to increase the level of force. For example, despite the demand from both Army and Unionists, the government decided not to re-introduce internment without trial. Now known as 'selective detention', internment was believed to violate all three of the principles described above: it contradicted the policy of Normalisation; it would have provoked Catholic resentment; and regardless of the fact that the security forces now knew the identities and whereabouts of many PIRA operatives, Mason was keen to stress that '"known"... does not

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[42] HC, Vol. 926, c. 1502, 23 February 1977

constitute guilt in a court of law'.[44] Also, the British government did not encourage, or approve of, the violation of foreign sovereignty. There were explicit orders not to cross the border,[45] and whilst individual units have undoubtedly ignored them, the vast majority of border incursions were accidental. The fact that unauthorised border crossings were carried out by both sides (that is, by British as well as Irish forces)[46] shows that the border was indeed 'long and difficult to patrol', as Thatcher remarked.[47] In view of the perceived significance of security co-operation to the British government (see 5.1), it is unlikely that London would have jeopardised Dublin's goodwill by instituting a policy that was believed to be an undesirable 'irritant' on both sides.[48]

Even though drastic measures were thus ruled out, the British government used whatever scope there was to increase the level of force within the constraints of British strategy. Mason described this approach as '[employing] all the constitutional means at my disposal... to the limit'.[49] This included, for example, a policy of arrests and re-arrests of paramilitary suspects, which attempted to disrupt illegal activities, harass 'known' members of paramilitary organisations, create opportunities to turn them into informers, and acquire further intelligence. As Mason explains:

> The mere fact of dragging suspects into a police station kept some of Northern Ireland's nastiest villains off the street, at least for a few days. Sometimes interrogation produced enough evidence to make a charge stick or enough to provide crucial intelligence information. Even when it didn't, the arrests badly disrupted IRA operations.[50]

In addition, the British government decided to increase the use of undercover units. The deployment of small and highly specialised units followed from the intention to reduce the profile of the Army as part of the Normalisation policy,

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[43] Ibid., cc. 1506-7
[44] HC, Vol. 922, c. 1938, 17 December 1976
[45] M. Urban, *Big Boys' Rules. The SAS and the Secret Struggle against the IRA* (London 1992), p. 9
[46] In the twelve months following April 1976, London registered 19 incursions of Irish security forces into British territory; see HC, Vol. 929, c. 614w, 7 April 1977
[47] Thatcher, p. 385
[48] Lord Orme, interview with author, 21 August 2001
[49] Mason, p. 224

the desire to cut Army casualties, and the renewed emphasis on improving the security forces' pool of intelligence. Furthermore, the formal introduction of the Special Air Service (SAS) to Northern Ireland in early 1976 served as a deterrent, which is why Prime Minister Wilson took the unprecedented step of announcing its deployment in public. According to Rees, it was 'more presentational and mystique-making than anything else',[51] and the fact that the SAS – with its reputation for ruthlessness and bravery – was soon made responsible for every suspicious incident in the province seemed to confirm its value in that regard. Still, even if there was no 'shoot-to-kill practice... that was endorsed by the authorities',[52] as some Republican sympathisers maintain, the deterrent effect clearly backfired when it turned out that some SAS units were involved in a series of controversial ambushes which involved the accidental – and ultimately avoidable – killing of civilians. Whilst it is not possible to examine every alleged 'shoot-to-kill' incident in detail, it is worth pointing out that the SAS also carried out many arrests, even in circumstances when 'silencing the suspect' could have spared the troops considerable embarrassment.[53] The idea of assassination squads is at odds with the strategic tradition of the British government generally, and it contradicts almost every tactical consideration of the security forces at the time, such as the near obsession with achieving convictions in court and the emphasis on turning arrestees into informers. Nonetheless, by scaling down its frontline role from 1978, the government conceded that the SAS was a military tool that was too imprecise to perform in an environment where the security forces were expected to adhere to the principle of minimum force at all times (on 'shoot-to-kill', see also 6.2).

The most significant change was therefore not so much one in the overall level of force, but one of paradigm. As shown in the previous chapter, the belief that PIRA could be politicised had been given up with the failure of *Sinn Fein* to take part in the elections for the Constitutional Convention. The

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[50] Ibid., pp. 171-2
[51] Rees, quoted in Urban, p. 7
[52] Newsinger, *Dangerous Men*, p. 33
[53] See, for instance, the case of Sean McKenna who claims that he was abducted from his home in the Republic of Ireland; J. Adams, A. Bambridge, R. Morgan, *Ambush. The War between the SAS and the IRA* (London 1998), p. 77

ceasefire was maintained for some time in order to facilitate some of the changes that were necessary to introduce the policy of Normalisation. With neither political nor military incentive left, the British government was now free to return to a policy of 'isolating the terrorists'. Arguably, the denial of any sign of political legitimacy was central to the concept of Criminalisation (see 4.2), and only Mason set out to implement it consistently. Still, the constraints of British strategy meant that the most obvious changes in this respect were of a rhetorical nature. Mason repeatedly ruled out the possibility of any form of amnesty, and he announced that there was no realistic chance of him ever talking to, or negotiating with, the representatives of the Republican movement (although even Mason emphasised that he would 'never say never').[54] He deliberately adopted a more belligerent language, which included statements like 'we are squeezing the terrorists like rolling up a toothpaste tube',[55] or the declaration that 'the net will tighten [around]... Ulster's rabble of gangsters and destroyers'.[56] In addition, the newspapers were filled with security statistics that appeared to illustrate the security forces' success in finding explosives, charging suspects and securing convictions.[57] Mason also put pressure on the media not to provide PIRA with a forum to present their ideas. While it would be misleading to describe this way of bargaining as state censorship, L. Curtis is probably correct in pointing out that the 'British way' of exerting subtle and informal pressures on the media was far more effective than Dublin's practice of using censorship powers overtly.[58]

It is debatable how effective Mason's approach was. After he had taken office, the level of violence went down sharply, and the number of annual deaths fell from 297 in 1976 (the second worst year in the history of the conflict) to 81 in 1978. On the Protestant side, the structures of the Loyalist paramilitaries were hit hard by the policy of re-arrests and the increasing

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[54] HC, Vol. 918, c. 686, 28 October 1976
[55] Mason, quoted in Hamill, p. 220
[56] 'No happy new year', *The Economist*, 1 January 1977, p.13
[57] See, for example, the RUC advertisement 'In 3 months', *Belfast Telegraph*, 4 April 1977
[58] L. Curtis, *Ireland. The Propaganda War* (London 1984), pp. 188-9; for a listing of all television programmes that were dropped, altered or delayed, see M. Holzberger, *Rundfunk- und Fernsehzensur im nordirischen Bürgerkrieg*, MA (Freie Universität Berlin, 1996), pp. i-iii

penetration with informers;[59] yet more fundamentally, Mason's vigorous statements, his self-declared 'will to win' and the overall strategy of providing stability by making Direct Rule a durable framework of government (see 5.1) helped to convince many Protestants that the Union was safe, and that armed resistance to PIRA's attempt at forcing a united Ireland upon the majority community was therefore unnecessary. In the following years, Loyalist paramilitary operations dropped by almost 90 per cent. However, with regard to the activities of the Republican paramilitaries, it is more difficult to pass a clear judgement. Even though Republican violence was halved, PIRA and the Irish National Liberation Army (INLA) demonstrated that they continued to possess the capability to mount highly disruptive attacks, such as with the assassinations of the Tory Northern Ireland spokesman Airey Neave and Lord Mountbatten in 1979. Arguably, the drop in PIRA's activity was largely due to structural and strategic changes within the Republican movement whose new leadership now asserted that there was 'no quick solution to our British problem', and that the military instrument had to be reorganised and prepared to fight a protracted campaign, the so-called Long War.[60] Whether the Long War doctrine was an immediate reaction to Mason's security policies, or whether it had followed from the continued frustration of PIRA's military efforts over several years, is difficult to say. In any case, Brigadier James Glover, in his 1978 assessment of 'future terrorist trends', conceded that PIRA 'will retain [sufficient] popular support', and he ascertained 'a continued trend towards greater professionalism and selectivity in targetting [sic]'.[61]

The relative merits of Mason's approach notwithstanding, the more substantial problems with London's military policy of Normalisation (see 4.2) arose from the ideological assumptions it rested on. Far from merely being 'contradictions of Ulsterisation', as Bew and Patterson chose to describe them,[62] Normalisation highlighted the contradictions of the British military approach in Northern Ireland as a whole. First, the idea of Ulsterisation

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[59] J. Holland, 'RUC calling the shots', *Hibernia*, 18 March 1977
[60] Smith, *Fighting for Ireland?*, pp. 152-61
[61] The so-called Glover Report 'Northern Ireland: Future Terrorist Trends' is reproduced in Faligot, pp. 223-42
[62] Bew, *The British*, p. 57

ignored the sectarian dynamics in the province. Even though the British government had repeatedly acknowledged that it was desirable to attract more Catholics to serve in the RUC, it clearly decided that the lack of Catholic recruits would represent no obstacle to its expansion. Westminster believed that Ulsterisation was an opportunity to reform and professionalise the local security forces, not least because the new recruits could be trained to follow a more impartial ethos. As Moyle explained:

> The [Royal Ulster] Constabulary now is to a very large extent a new force... [A]t least half the RUC are new to the force within the last five years. At a patrolling level.. it is very much a new police force compared with what it used to be.[63]

Whilst factually correct, the recruits continued to be almost exclusively Protestant. There was little awareness or understanding that, in a deeply divided society, the acceptance of law enforcement was bound to be perceived in sectarian terms, and that impartiality was not only determined by the objective professionalism of the local security forces but also by their communal composition. From a sectarian perspective, Ulsterisation thus produced a situation where one community was policing the other, and where law enforcement was likely to be seen as a tool in the inter-communal power struggle.[64]

Second, the notion that members of the paramilitaries were ordinary criminals and would be treated accordingly was incredible and inconsistent. The claim that London's presence in Northern Ireland served the purpose of upholding the rule of law was strongly believed by successive British governments, and there can be little doubt that the aspiration to the 'democratic ideal' represented an important ideological restraint on the execution of the military instrument. Still, the tension between the notion of 'normal' law enforcement in a liberal democracy and the requirements of a counterinsurgency campaign allowed for too many inconsistencies to make Westminster's claim believable. The reliance on uncorroborated evidence, extended holding powers, and the continued existence of non-jury courts, for

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[63] HC, Vol. 892, c. 634, 15 May 1975
[64] K. Boyle, T. Hadden, *Northern Ireland: a positive proposal* (London 1985), p. 70

example, proved to be a necessary and largely effective means of reducing the level of paramilitary activity, yet they were widely seen as significant diversions from established norms of justice in a liberal democracy (see 6.2). The restoration of police primacy highlighted the 'normality' of law enforcement in Northern Ireland, yet the need to perform some of the more robust operations that had previously been carried out by the Army clearly contradicted the British ideal of civilian policing.[65] The end of internment without trial was an important step towards re-establishing the primacy of trial in court, yet the resulting pressure to maintain military effectiveness – that is, to produce sufficient evidence to secure convictions – led to instances of police brutality, thus negating the gains in legitimacy which the abolition of internment had generated.[66]

The doctrine of Criminalisation and its apparent contradictions turned out to be highly disruptive, the most dramatic examples of which were the Hunger Strikes of 1980 and 1981. They were caused by the withdrawal of Special Category status which had been enjoyed by prisoners of paramilitary organisations since 1972.[67] As the privileges of Special Category allowed members of the paramilitaries to claim that they were in fact political prisoners, the removal of this status was the most symbolic means of showing that there was no difference between what the Army called 'ordinary decent criminals' and 'convicted terrorists'. Consequently, newly convicted prisoners were deprived of Special Category from March 1976; in March 1980, the status was withdrawn from all inmates who had hitherto enjoyed it. In accordance with the tenets of Criminalisation, Thatcher explained the government's reason for doing so: 'There is no such thing as political murder, political bombing or political violence. There is only criminal murder, criminal bombing and criminal violence. We will not compromise on this. There will be no political status'.[68] Her reluctance to seek an understanding, or to grant some of the prisoners' so-called Five Demands, was based on the

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[65] R.J. Weitzer, *Policing under Fire* (New York 1995), pp. 75-9

[66] See P. Taylor, *Beating the Terrorists? Interrogation in Omagh, Gough and Castlereagh* (Harmondsworth 1980); Amnesty International, *Report of an Amnesty International Mission to Northern Ireland* (London 1978)

[67] For the most comprehensive analysis of the Hunger Strikes, see P. O'Malley, *Biting at the Grave. The Irish Hunger Strikes and the Politics of Despair* (Belfast 1990)

assumption that 'what [the hunger strikers] want is not prison reform, but a special different status for some prisoners. This the government cannot concede'.[69] The idea that the principle of Criminalisation was at stake, and that the positions of British government and hunger strikers were therefore irreconcilable, was shared by the hunger strikers themselves, one of whom stated that 'it is only in a continuation of the hunger strike that the pressure needed to break the British criminalization policy can be obtained... The weapon for the criminalization policy must be removed from the British by achieving political status'.[70]

Whilst Thatcher's stance during the hunger strikes was justified within the limits of the doctrine she wanted to preserve, the government's position on the issue of political status illustrated the ambiguous nature of the doctrine itself. If the question of political status was indeed something that no democratic government could compromise, it is difficult to understand why Special Catgeory had been granted in the first place. The relative ease with which the British government had introduced Special Category in 1972 should have made clear that its subsequent withdrawal was ill-suited to be elevated to the status of principle, not least because it demonstrated that London's principles seemed to be negotiable. Moreover, even on the government's own terms, there was little foundation to support the claim that there was no political dimension to crime. The hunger strikers were arrested, held, questioned and tried under legislation that had been justified with reference to the so-called 'terrorist threat'. Given that – according to the Prevention of Terrorism Act (1974) – terrorism was 'the use of violence for *political* ends' (emphasis added),[71] common sense suggests that there were indeed two different categories of crime: one for ordinary, and another one for 'terrorist' (that is, political) offences. This differentiation was confirmed by Prior when, in an attempt to calm the mood and thus prevent the repetition of

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[68] Thatcher, quoted in 'Mrs Thatcher pledges no sellout on Ulster', *The Times*, 6 March 1981
[69] Thatcher, quoted in J. Dana, 'The 1981 Hungerstrike', http://larkspirit.com/hungerstrikes/1981.html
[70] Tom McElwee, quoted ibid.
[71] See HC, Vol. 882, c. 635, 28 November 1974

the events, he re-established some of the privileges for paramilitary prisoners after the end of the 1981 Hunger Strike.[72]

5.3 Honest broker? The impossibility of an internal settlement

Although the idea of making Direct Rule semi-permanent was alien to the British constitutional and political traditions, it was a perfectly coherent conclusion from London's repeated failure to establish devolution and power-sharing. After the breakdown of the 1974 Executive, the British government had decided that the Irish dimension had 'knocked everything' (see 4.1), and it was consequently watered down. After the failure of the following initiative, the Constitutional Convention, Westminster blamed the local politicians. According to Rees, the 'level of Irish politicians was very low',[73] and it simply made no sense to 'set exam papers when you know the candidates will fail'.[74] This feeling of contempt translated into a disregard for local political activity of any sort, the existence of which was seen as destructive and destabilising. When Mason set up a local economic council, he made it explicit that he did not want any politicians to be included: 'If, in this province, you decide to bring politicians on... then your economic council, first of all, will be very quickly bloated; and secondly, I don't want political squabbles to spill over'.[75] It followed that, with no input from either Dublin or local politicians, Direct Rule was not only the one remaining alternative, but also a framework which could be used to provide stability and good government until 'the existing leaders [were] replaced by abler successors more willing to reach a compromise across sectarian barriers', as Mason had reportedly hoped.[76] In the meantime, the British government would continue as an honest broker, and Direct Rule was therefore thought to be equally acceptable to both communities. Citing opinion polls, Rees believed that there was 'little problem

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[72] M. von Tangen Page, *Peace, Prisoners and Terrorism* (London 1998), pp. 63-4
[73] Rees, quoted in Benn, *Against*, p. 526
[74] Rees, quoted in R. Fox, 'Ulster: exit Mr. Softly Softly', *The Listener*, 16 September 1976, p. 324
[75] 'Roy Mason on the economic prospects in Northern Ireland', *The Listener*, 24 February 1977, p. 229
[76] C. Walker, 'Action man Mr Roy Mason has made his mark in Ulster', *The Times*, 27 January 1977

and certainly little opposition' to Direct Rule because 'the Catholics preferred government from London to a loyalist government at Stormont, and the loyalists preferred it to a Stormont government shared with republicans'.[77]

Arguably, it was rather ingenuous for London to expect that the present generation of local politicians would suddenly go away, or – even if they somehow did – that the next generation of 'abler successors' would come from nowhere. The more fundamental problem, however, arose from the central assumption on which the viability of Direct Rule rested. If, for negative reasons, Direct Rule was workable because it was both communities' second choice, its acceptability was bound to be affected by the fact that a significant section of the UUP moved towards full integration with Great Britain as a durable framework and welcomed Direct Rule as a first step in the right direction.[78] In this regard, the perception of Direct Rule changed into that of a partisan concept simply through its adoption by the main Unionist party and without any wrongdoing on behalf of the British government. If, for positive reasons, Direct Rule was politically feasible because Westminster was regarded as an honest broker, its acceptability was certain to suffer from Labour's loss of a majority in the House of Commons and the subsequent rumours of a 'parliamentary deal' between Labour and the Ulster Unionists.

Even if London denied it at the time, there can be little doubt that there was an understanding between Labour and the Ulster Unionists. In his memoirs, Callaghan admits that negotiations took place, and he adds that 'cooperation between Michael Foot [then Leader of the House of Commons] and Jim Molyneaux [then leader of the Ulster Unionist MPs] proved excellent'.[79] The most tangible result of this 'cooperation' was an increase in Northern Ireland seats in the House of Commons which Unionist MPs had demanded ever since Stormont was abolished in 1972. As late as March 1976, Rees declared that 'even to talk about extra representation in this House is to fly in

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[77] Rees, p. 290

[78] Enoch Powell, who became an Ulster Unionist MP in 1974, was the most prominent advocate of full integration; see E. Powell, 'The test of Britain's will to be a nation' in The Guardian (ed.), *Ulster '80. Year of Decision?* (London 1980), p. 2

[79] Callaghan, *Time*, p. 455

the face of history and cultural attitudes',[80] yet with Labour in need of Unionist support, Callaghan suddenly felt that 'the Government could legitimately concede that the case for more seats should be looked at again'.[81] The largely informal nature of the parliamentary arrangement makes it difficult to assess what further concessions were made. M. Holland, for instance, believed that the Unionists succeeded in stopping the policy of troop reductions.[82] Dixon, on the other hand, argues that Unionist pressure resulted in the delay of Draft Orders on the legalisation of homosexuality and the introduction of comprehensive education in Northern Ireland.[83] Even so, in one respect, London was clearly not prepared to give in: despite Unionist demands to the contrary, the Callaghan government stuck to the principle that any devolution of powers had to be 'acceptable' to the minority. London's commitment to this doctrine was first demonstrated in May 1977 when the government defied a Loyalist strike which attempted to bring about the restoration of Stormont.[84] Yet it equally applied to the Unionist demand for an expansion of local government. Whilst Dixon is right in pointing out that Mason's 1977 initiative (see 5.1) 'closely resembled the proposal for administrative devolution that James Molyneaux had begun to advocate',[85] it was different in one crucial aspect. It demanded that 'political parties representing different shades of opinion must be prepared to make the arrangements work'.[86] Mason stated that even the devolution of additional local government powers, if based on simple majority rule, was unacceptable because 'the minority in the province would reject that sort of approach'.[87] In fact, Mason's deputy, Don Concannon, reiterated the principle of 'concurring majorities' by declaring that 'any new arrangement must be made acceptable to a majority in both parts of the community. If it is rejected by one or the other, it will not survive'.[88] London's commitment to upholding the Nationalist veto on devolution was particularly remarkable given that, in a 'blatant bid for

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[80] Rees, quoted in P. Dixon, '"The usual English doubletalk": the British political parties and the Ulster Unionists, 1974-94, *Irish Political Studies*, 9:1 (1994), p. 27
[81] Callaghan, *Time*, p. 454
[82] M. Holland, 'Jim Callaghan's other allies', *New Statesman*, 14 October 1977, p. 656
[83] Dixon, 'The usual', p. 29
[84] For a comprehensive account of the 1977 Loyalist strike, see Bew, *Northern Ireland. A Chronology*, pp. 118-21
[85] Ibid., p. 28
[86] HC, Vol. 941, c. 1840, 12 January 1978
[87] HC, Vol. 953, c. 1713, 13 July 1978

Unionist support', the Conservative opposition had dropped power-sharing and adopted the Unionist policy of establishing regional councils.[89] This put additional pressure on the Callaghan government, and arguably, Labour could have survived the crucial vote of no confidence in March 1979 if Callaghan had committed himself to Molyneaux's ideas. Ironically, once elected, Thatcher was quick to distance herself from this policy once Labour had been toppled. As Goodhart explained: '[Atkins] realised that it was necessary to proceed with extreme caution, which he did. On the whole, one [therefore] followed pretty much the policy one had inherited'.[90]

Despite Callaghan's principled stance, the parliamentary deal between Labour and the Ulster Unionists had a profound effect on the acceptability of Direct Rule to the minority. Simply, the fact that London's self-declared role as 'honest broker' appeared to be subject to the parliamentary dynamics in the House of Commons implied that Nationalists needed to find a more reliable ally in order to set the balance of power straight. Whereas in 1975, the SDLP seemed willing to play down the Irish dimension in favour of an internal power-sharing settlement, the main Catholic party had convinced itself that its link to Dublin, and the inclusion of the Irish government in any settlement, was essential to ensuring that the minority's interests would be safeguarded. In its 1978 policy document, 'Towards a New Ireland', the SDLP argued:

> It is now clear that the problems of Northern Ireland can only be solved by joint Anglo-Irish action. The intransigence of a minority [the Unionists] can no longer be allowed to frustrate the settlement of a problem which is poisoning relations between the people of Ireland and between the people of the two islands.[91]

The SDLP's turn towards a more Nationalist attitude indicated that Direct Rule had lost any credibility as an acceptable constitutional framework amongst the minority, and that the idea of Westminster as an impartial and

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[88] HC, Vol. 952, c. 1830, 30 June 1978
[89] 'Blue and Orange?', *The Economist*, 24 June 1978, p. 19
[90] Sir Philipp Goodhart, interview with author, 10 July 2001
[91] 'Towards a New Ireland – Policy Review' (SDLP policy document), quoted in http://www.sdlp.ie/history70s.htm

honest broker had become untenable. Furthermore, the SDLP's powerful position as the only representative of constitutional Nationalism meant that the party could now exercise its veto over any plans to establish devolved structures. In other words, there could be no internal settlement anymore, and any new attempt at bringing about devolution and power-sharing had to include an institutionalised Irish dimension.

It took until 1982 for London to realise the full implications of the shift in Nationalist strategy. In the meantime, the British government undertook three attempts at producing a devolved settlement. With the possible exception of 'rolling devolution' in 1982 (see below), all of them sought to ease the (mainly external) pressures Westminster was exposed to as a result of Direct Rule (see 5.1). Structurally, the Mason initiative of 1978, the Constitutional Conference in 1980 and 'rolling devolution' followed a similar pattern, and even when compared to the devolutionary initiatives of the previous period, they were exercises in fine-tuning rather than genuine political evolution. In 1974, security powers and electoral arrangements had been excluded from the list of devolved powers, partly because of their divisive potential (see 4.3). The same logic applied to the abandonment of the Irish dimension in the run-up to the 1975 Constitutional Convention. With two failed attempts at achieving a devolved power-sharing settlement, the British government now decided to turn its political approach upside town: instead of handing over a number of pre-determined powers to a Home Rule government upfront, as in the 1972-75 period, any new institutions would have to start with little more than consultative or administrative responsibilities. Subject to agreement between the political parties from both majority and minority, 'real' powers would then be devolved gradually, starting with the least controversial areas and evolving towards full-scale devolution along the lines of the 1974 Executive. In London's view, the notion of 'a progressive transfer over a period of time'[92] had several advantages: it was more flexible and less destabilising, as powers would only be devolved in areas where there was a clear consensus on how the responsibilities would be exercised; and there

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[92] 'The Government of Northern Ireland – a Working Paper for a Conference', Cmd. 7763 (London 1979), p. 3; for a comprehensive account of the origins of 'rolling devolution', see C. O'Leary, S. Elliott, R.A. Wilford, *The Northern Ireland Assembly* (London 1988), pp. 67-80

was an incentive for both sides to find an accommodation, as otherwise there would be no transfer of any powers at all. With regard to power-sharing, the British government continued to put the requirement of minority participation in less stringent terms than in the run-up to the 1974 Executive. According to Mason, power-sharing was an 'emotive term', and he therefore preferred to make the case for 'partnership and [minority] participation in the administration of Northern Ireland' instead.[93] The White Paper for the Constitutional Conference supplied a whole range of suggestions as to how minority interests could be safeguarded: by minority participation in the executive, through weighed votes and committees, in a so-called 'executive chamber', or by vote of confidence.[94] The 1982 rolling devolution scheme made the support of 70 per cent of the Assembly a requirement for the transfer of powers,[95] and like all his predecessors, Prior declared that 'any arrangement to devolve power would simply not work unless it had widespread acceptance throughout the community'.[96] Hence, even though the attitude towards power-sharing had become more flexible, Westminster's determination to maintain the Nationalist veto on devolution remained firm.

The failure of all three initiatives can be traced back to the shortcomings of Direct Rule, and the strategic changes it had triggered. In 1978, with full integration on top of the Unionist agenda and both Labour and Conservatives competing for Unionist votes in the House of Commons, there was no incentive for the UUP to discuss devolution. In fact, as it was stressed at the time, the Unionists were 'liable to sit tight until Mr Callaghan goes to the country'.[97] In 1980, whilst the UUP refused even to participate in the Constitutional Conference, the SDLP now insisted on a separate round of talks that would deal with the Irish dimension (which had originally been excluded from London's proposals). This, however, proved unacceptable to the DUP, and the Conference consequently ended without achieving any tangible results. The 1982 Assembly, on the other hand, operated until 1986, and even though some authors argue that it turned out to be a valuable

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[93] HC, Vol. 941, c. 1836, 12 January 1978
[94] 'The Government', Cmd. 7763, pp. 9-11
[95] See 'Northern Ireland: A Framework for Devolution', Cmd. 8541 (London 1982)
[96] HC, Vol. 46, c. 555, 21 July 1983
[97] 'Back to go', *The Economist*, 21 January 1978, p. 23

forum for consultation, it never achieved its original purpose.[98] The notion that a new political initiative along the lines of the previous attempts at achieving devolution would 'win back support for moderation'[99] backfired spectacularly when the SDLP decided not take its seats in the 'rolling devolution' Assembly whilst *Sinn Fein* managed to gain 10.1 per cent of the vote. In Prior's words: 'As soon as the SDLP announced that it was not going to take part in the Assembly, it was a dead duck... One kept it going for a bit, to allow [some Unionist] steam to be blown off, and to show that we were.. committed to [the creation of] a devolved system'.[100]

In addition, the emergence of *Sinn Fein* as an electoral force made it even more difficult for constitutional Nationalism to adopt a moderate position. Hardly anyone anticipated the extent to which the hunger strikes could galvanise certain sections of the Catholic populace in support of the Republican movement.[101] Regarding London, the ignorance of the sectarian dynamics in a deeply divided society had led to a gross underestimation of the hunger strikers' potential to mobilise the minority community. As Philipp Goodhart (an NIO minister in 1979-81) explained:

> [A]s far as quite a lot of the governmental machine was concerned, *Sinn Fein* was looked upon with the same enthusiasm as one might have looked upon a group of Nazis, and if Rudolf Hess wants to starve himself to death, so be it... To a degree, Sinn Fein/IRA was regarded as more of a fascist organisation than an ordinary Western democratic organisation. Indeed, those people were regarded as semi-criminal, more criminal than political.[102]

The idea that the fault line in Northern Ireland society was not between the two communities, but rather between the 'men of violence' and the supposedly peaceloving population from both communities, had long dominated British thinking on the use of the political instrument. Yet the doctrine of Criminalisation had given additional impetus as well as moral and

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[98] See B. Hadfield, 'Northern Ireland affairs at Westminster' in P. Roche, B. Barton (eds.), *The Northern Ireland Question: Myth and Reality* (Aldershot 1991), pp. 143-6
[99] Prior, p. 192
[100] Lord Prior (James Prior), interview with author, 27 November 2001
[101] It was not expected by the leadership of PIRA either, which resisted the idea of a second hunger strike after the first one in 1980 had ended in defeat; see P. Bishop, E. Mallie, *The Provisional IRA* (London 1987), p. 362
[102] Sir Philip Goodhart, interview with author, 21 July 2001

political justification to the notion that the 'terorrists' were at the fringes of the society which, in turn, blinded the British government to the fact that even anti-republican Catholics, such as Mairead Corrigan (who co-founded the peace movement in 1976), saw them as 'men from our community. We know how they have come to be there. And above all we don't want them suffering within the prisons'.[103] It was, therefore, incomprehensible to the British government that the SDLP withdrew from the by-election for the seat of Fermanagh and South Tyrone in favour of the hunger striker Bobby Sands; and it was equally inconceivable that a majority of Catholics in this constituency neither abstained nor spoiled their votes, but in fact decided to lend active support to an imprisoned 'criminal'.

Even if a clear majority of Catholics continued to support constitutional Nationalists, Bobby Sands' victory, as well as *Sinn Fein*'s relative success in the Assembly elections, refuted the idea that the 'men of violence' were isolated, and that – as Alison had declared – 'certain movements in Northern Ireland have singularly failed to put their policies to the electoral test... because they know that they will obtain only a derisory response'.[104] Equally, it was a damning indictment of the policy of 'caring' and 'positive' Direct Rule which had left the SDLP with nothing to show. Instead of strengthening the moderates, Direct Rule had in fact proved to many Catholics that constitutional Nationalism was not the way forward, and it forced the SDLP into adopting the more intransigent attitude towards the British government at the time of the Labour-Unionist understanding. In short, the supposedly stabilising impact of Direct Rule had turned out as both destabilising and polarising.

5.4 'Bread and circuses'? The limits of economic development

Economic policy in the Mason period needs to be examined at various levels. On the one hand, Mason's view of economic policy was entirely consistent with the British tradition of using the economic instrument. Like all his

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[103] Corrigan, quoted in O'Malley, *The uncivil*, p. 268

predecessors, Mason strongly believed that there was a link between peace and prosperity. Accordingly, he declared that '[b]y providing people with jobs, better housing and good education, we can instil confidence in the future and steadily erode the influence of extremists and men of violence'.[105] Throughout Mason's tenure, Westminster would therefore engage in the same sort of activities as previous governments in trying to improve the financial incentive structure for potential investors, promoting Northern Ireland abroad, expanding the state sector, and enhancing the overall social infrastructure. On the other hand, it is hardly possible to understand the wider significance of economic policy in the Mason period without putting it in the context of London's overall strategy. For example, whilst London's commitment to devoting substantial resources to economic development is widely acknowledged, many critics have maintained that – in a 'cynical political calculation'[106] – the British government had decided to substitute political progress for economic largesse. According to McGarry and O'Leary, Mason's 'bread and circuses' were therefore 'little better than opiates'.[107] This view, however appealing its logic, appears to overstate the degree to which the use of the political and economic instruments was co-ordinated in the process of formulating British strategy. Whereas both political activity and economic progress were undoubtedly elements of one calculus, a close reading of the sources suggests that – in London's view – their respective link to the overall objective of stability was autonomous: political activity was seen as destabilising, and it was therefore discouraged; economic progress, on the other hand, was regarded as a positive factor, and it was consequently given more prominence. Thus, from London's perspective, it was perfectly plausible to explain the function of economic policy simply as an outcome of the desire for stability. As Raymond Carter stated:

> You were trying to impose on a chaotic situation some degree of order, some stability, some sense of social cohesiveness... [w]hat you were trying to do was to make small advances wherever you could. If the building of a sports centre was a contribution, you did it. If building

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[104] HC, Vol. 971, c. 741, 25 July 1979
[105] HC, Vol. 934, c. 644, 30 June 1977
[106] Bew, *The British*, p. 92
[107] O'Leary, *The Politics*, p. 208

> a road would help, if attracting inward investment would help, you did it.[108]

Whilst the critics are therefore wrong to suggest that London 'cynically' aimed at compensating for the lack of political activity by throwing money at the province, the dependence on economic progress was an inevitable – if unintended – result of Westminster's overall strategy. In fact, in a reversal of the critics' argument, one could argue that whereas in earlier periods the political 'opiate' of institutional initiatives had served as a substitute for economic development, this excuse had now become untenable. With no significant political developments – and therefore no one to blame – Westminster had literally exposed itself: whether Direct Rule was indeed seen as 'caring' and 'compassionate' now depended largely on Westminster's ability to come to terms with non-constitutional factors such as security and the economy.

Economic progress, however, hinged on many variables, some of which were beyond Westminster's control. Most fundamentally, London could not easily alter the fact that there was a global recession that accelerated the decline of traditional industries (for instance, textiles and shipbuilding).[109] Even in other sectors of the economy, the recession had forced multinational companies to increase efficiency rather than expand, so that 'in present economic circumstances, the tentacles [that is, the Northern Ireland branch plants] are likely to be cut off before the main body', as Mason recognised.[110] In addition, the armed conflict continued to undermine Northern Ireland's image, in particular since PIRA had embarked on an assassination campaign of prominent businessmen.[111] It came as no surprise, therefore, that an assessment by a group of civil servants, the so-called Quigley report, painted a gloomy picture of the province's economic prospects. It warned that any positive development of the Northern Ireland economy rested on a number of factors, such as less violence, a general upturn in the economic cycle, and

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[108] Raymond Carter, interview with author, 30 July 2001
[109] Rowthorn, pp. 82-3
[110] HC, Vol. 918, c. 679, 28 October 1976
[111] See C. Walker, 'The impact of Belfast on one investor', *The Times*, 17 March 1977

the retention of Northern Ireland's competitive position. Even if all the conditions were met, Quigley argued, the best the government could hope for was a stabilisation of the unemployment figures.[112] Hence, one could hardly imagine a worse time to stake one's credibility on an upturn in the economy. Yet, by abandoning the idea of immediate political progress, London had done exactly that, and as a result, it had made itself and its idea of stability through Direct Rule vulnerable.

The flaws in Westminster's strategy would soon become evident. Despite Quigley's recommendation that 'we must hold onto what we have... encourage it to increase its efficiency and, where possible, generate its own growth',[113] London's dependence on economic progress implied that the government needed to campaign aggressively for additional inward investment. In times of recession, however, available investment was scarce and the competition between governments fierce. This meant that venturesome (and sometimes fraudulent) investors were not only offered support that would have been difficult to obtain otherwise, but that they were able to shift the financial risk onto the governments that were desperate to secure any additional employment available.[114] These dynamics manifested themselves most clearly in the case of the DeLorean car factory, which resulted in the loss of £85m in government subsidies between 1978 and 1982 (when the factory was closed down). To the British government, the attractions of a sports car factory in West Belfast were obvious. In addition to the promise of creating more than 2,500 jobs in Northern Ireland's most deprived area, DeLorean was thought of as a 'trailblazer' that would raise the province's international profile and lead to further investments. Moreover, with regard to the internal situation, the factory was seen as a 'morale booster' that would improve the general mood and revive optimism far beyond West Belfast.[115] In that sense, it was a substitute for political progress indeed, and Mason openly admitted that the project 'would have to

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[112] Report by Review Team, *Economic and Industrial Strategy for Northern Ireland* (Belfast 1976), pp. 66-7
[113] Ibid.
[114] See B. Rolston, M. Tomlinson, *Unemployment in West Belfast. The Obair Report* (Belfast 1988), p. 82
[115] I. Fallon, J. Srodes, *DeLorean. The rise and fall of a dream-maker* (London 1983), p. 127

be decided not just on the grounds of pure economics but on the basis of a political judgement too'.[116] Hence, more than the number of jobs involved, it was the wider relevance of DeLorean to Westminster's overall strategy which explains why the British government was prepared to abandon economic common sense and go ahead with the proposed investment. Whilst in different times, the government might have spotted the risks, Westminster's sense of urgency meant that the government failed to exercise proper scrutiny: Mason insisted on signing a provisional commitment three days after the government had learned about the project, and even though the full financial implications had not yet been clear, a master agreement was finalised only a further six weeks later.[117] Despite repeated advice that the demand for sports cars was declining, and that DeLorean's business plan was based on a series of overtly optimistic assumptions, the government shouldered the financial risk to the extent that the company's founder, John DeLorean, 'did not have to put in a penny [himself]'.[118] In his memoirs, Mason would blame DeLorean's failure on the Conservative government's 'lack of political will' and its free-market ideology which contradicted the 'detailed, hands-on supervision' that his government had allegedly exercised.[119] Given that Mason himself had agreed to leaving the government with a small minority of voting shares,[120] this excuse sounds rather unconvincing. In reality, London's reliance on economic progress had simply blinded the government to the fact that DeLorean's project was not viable, and only Prior, who became Northern Ireland Secretary in 1981, would acknowledge that '[o]ne of the tragedies of Northern Ireland is that it attracts so many risky businesses, those which perhaps do not go elsewhere because they can't get the cash'.[121]

London's vigour in promoting inward investment was not matched by an equal degree of enthusiasm in eradicating the relative deprivation between the two communities. As in previous years, the government's approach

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[116] Mason, p. 219
[117] Fallon, p. 127
[118] Ibid., p. 116
[119] Mason, p. 221
[120] See NIO minister David Butler; HC, Vol. 2, c. 1104, 9 April 1981
[121] Prior, p. 209

towards tackling the issue of economic and social inequality remained discreet. Following a recommendation in the Quigley report,[122] the growth centre strategy of the Stormont period (which favoured Protestant areas) was now officially reversed and efforts were made to locate new investment in areas of high unemployment. Equally, improvements in the social infrastructure focused on areas of urban deprivation (especially West Belfast), thus prompting accusations of reverse discrimination by Protestant politicians.[123] Overall, however, the British government continued to shy away from addressing the issue in a way that would have brought about tangible changes to the economic imbalance between Catholics and Protestants. Quigley had warned about the sectarian implications of a declining economy, and even though his description of Northern Ireland as a 'dual economy' did not explicitly refer to the sectarian divide, he made it sufficiently clear that the global recession would affect those on the margins of the labour market disproportionately.[124] It followed that the disparities between Protestants and Catholics – the latter of which were more likely to be unemployed, unskilled or employed in traditional industries – would 'persist and probably widen', as the head of the Fair Employment Agency (FEA), Robert Cooper, predicted.[125] London's total failure to respond to these concerns, or even to formulate a coherent stance on the wider issue, reveals the unease with which the problem was treated. As in the 1972-75 period, it appears that the reaction of the British government was informed by a mixture of ignorance, complacency, the desire not to offend the Protestants and an individualistic concept of social justice which did not allow for sweeping changes along community lines (see 4.4). The FEA, which was created by the Fair Employment Act (1976), was of little help. As McCormack points out, the agency was underfunded and lacked both the means of carrying out thorough investigations and the powers of forcing employers to change recruiting patterns – or even to reveal the names of companies which had engaged in discrimination. He concluded:

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[122] Report, *Economic and*, p. 67
[123] C. Walker, 'It still pays to be Protestant', *The Times*, 12 January 1978
[124] Report, *Economic and*, p. 66
[125] Cooper, quoted in 'Ulster Catholics lose ground', *The Economist*, 26 January 1980, p. 27

> The Fair Employment Act (1976) saw an inadequate piece of legislation being operated by an underfunded and uncertain Fair Employment Agency opting for education and public relations exercises instead of effective law enforcement. This and the complacency of successive British governments towards inequality in Northern Ireland has done little to allay growing Catholic disillusionment.[126]

The mere fact that the companies were under no obligation to disclose the religious affiliation of their workforce to the FEA demonstrated how impossible it was to monitor employment practices effectively. Even staunch opponents of the legislation, like Paisley, wondered how 'this Fair Employment Agency can... act... when there is [no] breakdown on figures'.[127] Apart from publishing reports on issues like work ethics, educational imbalances etc., which may have contributed to the creation of public awareness, the FEA's existence made little or no difference to the economic situation of the minority community. In an usually frank statement, Atkins admitted, therefore, that the FEA and the other institutions that dealt with discrimination in employment (such as the Commissioner for Complaints) were 'somewhat cumbersome bodies and rather slow to act'.[128] Still, nothing was done, and even Cooper conceded the impotency of his agency by calling for 'strong and constructive' government intervention to break existing employment patterns.[129]

It is often implied that the change of government in 1979 fundamentally changed economic policy towards the province. According to Rowthorn and Wayne, for example, the Conservatives simply abandoned the principle of peace and prosperity. Thatcher's economic policy in Northern Ireland, they argue, reflected 'the Tories' general indifference to the problems of poor regions, but it also indicate[d] their disbelief in the idea that it is cost-effective to try to defuse political opposition in Northern Ireland through spending on social services'.[130] Even if there can be no doubt that Mason's policy of economic largesse was partially reversed after 1979, the immediate change

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[126] V. McCormack, *Enduring Inequality: religious discrimination in employment in Northern Ireland* (London 1990), p. 33
[127] HC, Vol. 957, c. 1177, 9 November 1978
[128] HC, Vol. 978, c. 721, 7 February 1980
[129] Cooper, quoted in 'Ulster Catholics', *The Economist*, 26 January 1980

was not as fundamental as Rowthorn and Wayne imply. Adam Butler, who was a Minister of State under Prior, clearly stated that his government attached 'considerable importance to tackling the economic as well as the political problem, because [there is a] close relationship between the two'.[131] As a result, some areas of public spending escaped the drastic cuts that were implemented on the British mainland. For example, whilst the government started its retreat from public housing in Great Britain, Prior took pride in increasing the amount of money that was made available for this purpose in Northern Ireland.[132] The province would also keep the most attractive incentive structure for industrial development in the United Kingdom and, arguably, in the whole of Western Europe.[133] The stated objectives of supporting established businesses, encouraging the start of local businesses, and attracting companies from outside were well within the traditional framework of previous government's economic policy, even if the means of doing so now incorporated some fashionable neo-liberal ideas (for instance, by introducing so-called 'Enterprise Zones' in Belfast and Derry-City).[134] Rowthorn and Wayne are correct in asserting that the expansion of the state sector in the province slowed down from 1979, yet – as their own statistics show – it continued to grow in the first years of Thatcher's reign, most notably in health and education, where differences between Northern Ireland and Great Britain continued to persist.[135] Whilst London demanded that the dependency on government subsidies had to decrease, this trend towards 'greater selectivity and targeting'[136] cannot, in itself, be taken as an indicator of any fundamental change in London's attitude towards the province (see 6.4). Consequently, the rapid deterioration of the economic situation in Northern Ireland – which saw unemployment figures increase by 50 per cent in less than a year to stand at almost 100,000 (or 17.3 per cent) by early 1981 – needs to be understood primarily as a result of the continuing recession, and Northern Ireland's strong dependence on trade with the British mainland.

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[130] Rowthorn, p. 87
[131] HC, Vol. 10, c. 979, 29 October 1981
[132] Prior, p. 210
[133] 'Investment incentives', *The Times,* 30 April 1980
[134] HC, Vol. 1, cc. 332-4, 18 March 1981
[135] Rowthorn, p. 86

5.5 Conclusion

In a reversal of the previous period of British involvement in Northern Ireland, when London had intended to rid itself of the burden of governing the province, the British government now wanted to govern the province but failed to withstand the pressures that would have allowed it to do so.

With the dissolution of the Constitutional Convention, the British government decided that no new constitutional initiatives would be pursued. As a result of the repeated failure to produce a power-sharing settlement, London had concluded that a stable constitutional, political, military and economic environment was a crucial pre-condition for the return to devolution. Hence, power-sharing with devolution continued to be Westminster's objective, yet its realisation was now believed to lie in the long rather than the short term. In the meantime, stability became an interim objective, and Direct Rule would be embraced as a durable constitutional framework. As a consequence, the strategic instrument was rearranged as follows:

- the constitutional instrument, to emphasise that the 'myth of British withdrawal is dead for ever',[137] and that no devolutionary initiatives would be undertaken.
- the military instrument, to implement the policy of Normalisation fully whilst attempting to increase the level of force within the limits set by the rule of law.
- the political instrument, to discourage local political activity and wait for the current generation of provincial leaders to be replaced by 'abler successors'.
- the economic instrument, to renew one's efforts to reduce unemployment and achieve social and economic parity with the rest of the United Kingdom.

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[136] F. Gaffikin, M. Morissey, *Northern Ireland. The Thatcher Years* (London 1990), p. 84
[137] Mason, quoted in C. Walker, 'Mr Mason rules out devolution in Ulster', *The Times*, 14 September 1977

In itself, the notion of stability as a pre-condition for constitutional progress was a perfectly coherent response to London's previous experience, and Direct Rule was the obvious constitutional setting under which to carry the new strategy through. Still, despite its apparent appeal to policymakers at the time, Westminster's strategy was fatally flawed. It assumed an almost ideal game situation, that is, one in which London was the only actor to determine the strategic environment. As it turned out, all the assumptions on which the presumed link between Direct Rule and stability rested were to be undermined. First, the government of the Republic of Ireland consistently – and successfully – frustrated the assumption that Northern Ireland was a domestic matter. Second, as a result of its dwindling majority in the House of Commons, the Labour government compromised its self-declared role of honest broker by forging a parliamentary deal with the Ulster Unionists. Third, Westminster's capability to produce stability through economic development was limited in view of a global recession and the continuation of the conflict. Fourth, the overall security situation improved, yet the self-imposed constraints of Normalisation and London's military tradition meant that PIRA's capacity to disrupt remained considerable. In practice, Westminster's idea of Direct Rule had therefore made the British government vulnerable, and contrary to its original idea, the main effects of the strategy were both destabilising and polarising: external pressures resulted in the need to embark on half-hearted attempts at producing a devolved settlement; the inconsistencies of Criminalisation mobilised the minority against British rule and disproved the idea of a 'moderate centre'; the disdain for local political activity as well as the Labour-Unionist understanding pushed the SDLP towards a more Nationalist position; and the reliance on economic progress in times of recession meant that money had to be wasted on risky or unproductive ventures whilst no tangible improvements to the overall situation could be achieved.

The consequences of the second Hunger Strike in 1981 signified the eventual collapse of London's strategy. Even so, the treatment of the years 1976-82 as a single unit illustrates that it was not one event that explains the

re-formulation of British strategy, but that it resulted from the deficiencies of London's existing approach as a whole. Regarding the evolution of British strategy, the 1976-82 period showed that the Irish dimension of the conflict was not merely a traditional British instinct – one that could be abandoned if the circumstances did not suit – but that, again, it had become a constitutional and political imperative without which any policy of containment was unworkable. To summarise, in the 1976-82 period, the British government was compelled to acknowledge that the conflict was not a purely domestic matter, even if it had initially declared it to be one. The failure of Direct Rule in the 1976-82 period thus provides the key to explaining the change in attitude towards the government of the Republic of Ireland which dominated the following period of British involvement in the conflict.

6 Sharing the burden: the refinement of British strategy, 1982-88

The Anglo-Irish Agreement (AIA) of 1985 was the central political event of the 1982-88 period. It originated from the pressures that had made the operation of undiminished Direct Rule in the 1976-82 period impossible. Although it was immediately described as 'the most significant political development since the state of Northern Ireland was created',[1] its real significance would only become obvious many years after its conclusion.

Since Westminster's traditional aspiration of devolution and power-sharing remained an unlikely prospect, London's aim of containing the conflict now translated into the objective of creating an inter-governmental framework, thus easing the operation of Direct Rule and providing for a durable accommodation with the Irish government. However, London's traditional pragmatism, and its consequent inability to comprehend the psychological and political significance with which the majority community approached the constitutional question, meant that the conclusion of the Anglo-Irish Agreement resulted in a period of sustained political stalemate which appeared to make the operation of Direct Rule even more difficult. From a strategic perspective, the AIA can therefore be judged a failure. Even so, the accord produced a series of unexpected outcomes which turned out be highly significant in the longer term. On the Unionist side, the perception that the 'centre of gravity' had shifted towards an all-Ireland setting provided an incentive to re-engage with the other parties. On the Republican side, the accord contributed to the impression of political and military stalemate. Ironically, and contrary to London's expectations, the treaty thus provided the political foundation on which Westminster's traditional objective of devolution and power-sharing could be realised in the peace process of the following period.

6.1 Consensus – the re-emergence of the Irish dimension

As a result of external pressures in the 1976-82 period, Westminster had convinced itself that the maintenance of undiminished Direct Rule from London was not a viable framework in which to contain the conflict. As there was little realistic prospect of a devolved cross-community settlement either, the British government concluded that the handling of the province could only be eased by exploring the possibility of joint action with the Irish government. Dublin's consistent interventions, and its failure to co-operate cordially with the British government, were regarded as one of the main reasons for why the Direct Rule approach in the 1976-82 period had to be abandoned (see 5.1). It was therefore obvious that London's aims in the bilateral negotiations were related to the areas in which the actions of the Irish government had been perceived as particularly disruptive.

The most tangible British interest lay in the field of security co-operation, which London believed to be unsatisfactory. As Thatcher explained: 'We wanted to bring solutions to these problems, some of which required the Irish to deploy more resources to the border, others of which were really a matter of political will'.[2] Second, the British government expected that Dublin's collaboration would end the minority's reluctance to support the security forces in Northern Ireland and, to a lesser extent, the political system in general. Robert Andrew, who was Permanent Secretary at the NIO, hoped 'that the Agreement would allow moderate Nationalists to support the law and order effort more than hitherto, and that, for example, the SDLP would encourage Catholics to join the RUC'.[3] Third, London aimed at making the Irish government a responsible 'stakeholder' in the management of Northern Ireland, thus ending the 'megaphone diplomacy' between the two governments which had undermined Anglo-Irish relations and produced criticism of the British government from within the British Isles and abroad. Accordingly, Christopher Mallaby, the co-ordinator of Anglo-Irish relations at the Cabinet Office, described his task as follows:

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[1] D. McKittrick, 'Unionists see only sinister cloud with no silver linings', *The Listener,* 21 November 1985, p. 5
[2] Thatcher, p. 398

> [W]e were to establish whether it was possible to have an agreement with the Irish Republic which would facilitate the United Kingdom's handling of the Northern Ireland issue without making unacceptable changes... The first question was [therefore]: can we achieve a better relationship between London and Dublin – concerning Northern Ireland but also generally.[4]

Whilst both governments agreed on the need to contain the conflict, and whilst none of them questioned the existence of Northern Ireland in principle, there was a fundamental difference in perspective. Whereas London was primarily concerned with settling a number of immediate problems in order to ease the operation of an otherwise acceptable constitutional framework, the Irish government started from the wider assumption that instability and violence would only cease if one managed to overcome the alienation of the minority from the institutions of government. Accordingly, FitzGerald believed that the only way of resolving the conflict was 'to act urgently and resolutely together on the political front' in order to find an entirely new constitutional arrangement that would be more acceptable to the Nationalists.[5] In Dublin's view, undiminished British rule – as in Direct Rule – could never achieve this aim. In the absence of power-sharing, the Irish government therefore needed to assume the role of a 'guarantor' by participating in the government of the province through a system of 'joint authority' which would retain British sovereignty over the province but include Dublin as an equal partner in the process of decision-making. It was, in FitzGerald's view, 'simply a method that the British government might choose to adopt in the exercise of its sovereignty in order to regulate affairs of one part of the United Kingdom'.[6] Also, it was believed that 'joint authority' provided a powerful incentive for the Unionists to agree to power-sharing, the advent of which would trigger a reduction of Dublin's role in the government of Northern Ireland (see 6.3).

In principle, the constitutional tradition of the British government did not contradict 'joint authority'. In practice, however, the British government

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[3] Sir Robert Andrew, interview with author, 21 November 2001
[4] Sir Christopher Mallaby, interview with author, 15 November 2001
[5] FitzGerald, quoted in J. Havilland, 'Thatcher welcomes Dublin offer to tackle terrorism', *The Times*, 24 December 1983
[6] FitzGerald, p. 502

intended to achieve a 'balanced' outcome, that is, one in which both sides would eventually acquiesce. Since Nationalist concerns were represented by the Irish government, the limit on what Westminster could concede in the negotiations was consequently determined by what was thought to be acceptable to the majority community. Even though London was aware that *any* form of institutionalised co-operation with Dublin would arouse Unionist suspicions (hence 'Thatcher's personal decision not to consult the Unionists until the very last minute when the thing was ready'),[7] the British government needed to avoid a situation in which united Unionist opposition would render the province ungovernable – as in 1974, when a Loyalist stoppage forced the British government to abandon the power-sharing Executive (see Chapter 4). In institutional terms, Westminster assumed this line to be crossed once Dublin was given 'real powers'. As Mallaby explained:

> Any situation where the British government would require the Irish government's agreement to any action or policy would be unacceptable. Where we would have their advice, and where they would have opportunities to lobby us – and indeed reflect the views of the minority in Northern Ireland – that we would be willing to consider.[8]

It followed that whilst any form of joint authority was 'out',[9] the formalisation of a consultative role was believed to be unproblematic. In London's view, consultation did not infringe upon parliamentary sovereignty, nor was it considered a substantial concession. As Prior's successor, Douglas Hurd, explained: 'Giving the Republic a voice in the internal matters of the province did not struck me as a problem, because they already had it. If there was some event... the Irish Foreign Minister, Peter Barry, used to phone me anyway. He didn't need a treaty to do that'.[10]

It could be argued, therefore, that Dublin's intention to seek fundamental political and constitutional change stood against the more limited expectations on the British side, which were determined by the desire to produce a balanced agreement that was acceptable to both majority and

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[7] Sir Christopher Mallaby, interview with author, 15 November 2001
[8] Ibid.
[9] Thatcher, quoted in P. Webster, 'Irish summit again soon after "realistic" talks', *The Times*, 20 November 1984

minority alike. Consequently, even FitzGerald's rhetorical 'trump card' – the growth of *Sinn Fein* and the prospect of a 'British Cuba' – failed to achieve the desired result of impressing upon London the need for substantial changes with regard to Northern Ireland's constitutional status. Thatcher explained that she 'shared his aim of preventing Ireland falling under hostile and tyrannical forces. But that was not an argument for taking measures which would simply provoke the Unionists and cause unnecessary trouble'.[11] The same logic applied to the possibility of dropping the articles in the Irish Constitution that laid claim to the whole island of Ireland, and which had, therefore, been a longstanding Unionist grievance. Originally, London was keen to secure this concession, but since FitzGerald linked any change in the Republic's constitution to the attainment of 'joint authority', the British government soon lost interest. According to Hurd: 'A bargain which gave them joint sovereignty – which was a huge concession, and which might have suffered the same fate as the Sunningdale Agreement – in return for a change of the Constitution was not... a jewel worth paying a big price for'.[12]

In the academic literature on the subject, the emergence of the AIA is often explained as a result of individual predispositions and/or organisational conflicts.[13] This approach is also employed by both Nationalists and Unionists in order to rationalise why desired outcomes could not be achieved. For example, FitzGerald believed that pro-Unionist tendencies within the NIO were responsible for obstructing Dublin's idea of 'joint authority'.[14] Unionist authors, on the other hand, blame the influence of the Foreign Office for concluding a deal that 'suspends Northern Ireland in an ante-chamber of the Union'.[15] Whilst it is true that the NIO's perspective was different from that of the Foreign Office, it would be far-fetched to argue that this difference in outlook was the primary determinant of the agreement. In fact, the majority of individuals involved in its negotiation agree that both departments co-operated as much as they argued, and – more importantly perhaps – they

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[10] Lord Hurd (Douglas Hurd), interview with author, 4 December 2001
[11] Thatcher, p. 401
[12] Lord Hurd, interview with author, 4 December 2001
[13] See, for example, P. Arthur, *Special Relationships. Britain, Ireland, and the Northern Ireland Problem* (Belfast 2000), pp. 210-20
[14] FitzGerald, p. 520

relied on each other's expertise. For instance, contrary to what one would expect from a bitter inter-departmental struggle, the Foreign Secretary, Geoffrey Howe, valued the fact that the NIO officials 'knew the tensions, they knew the pressures, they knew the anxieties that were borne in upon them from the Unionist community'.[16] Likewise, Unionists found it hard to reconcile the content of the AIA with Thatcher's self-declared Unionism. One Unionist MP, Enoch Powell, even suggested that the attack at the 1984 Conservative party conference in Brighton had '[b]ombed [Thatcher] into submission'.[17] In reality, Thatcher's ideological commitment was less absolute than her rhetoric. Thatcher's repeated consideration of repartition suggests that the idea of giving 'not an inch' was alien to her;[18] and both FitzGerald and Prior recall (separate) occasions on which she complained that public money spent in Northern Ireland was needed 'for my people in England'.[19] Thatcher's 'Unionism' arose from the conviction that the rule of law needed to be preserved in every part of the United Kingdom, but there was no overwhelming emotional commitment to the place as such. Accordingly, Hurd described her as an 'anti-Unionist Unionist': 'She had no real affection for Northern Ireland... She was a Unionist because she was for the Union and we had a responsibility here, but she didn't like the Unionists'.[20]

From the perspective of strategic evolution, the most interesting question is whether the AIA indicated any significant shift in Westminster's attitude towards the constitutional position of the province. As with Sunningdale, the vagueness and deliberate ambiguities of the AIA allowed for a wide range of interpretations.[21] It is useful, therefore, to outline the AIA's content before attempting to analyse its meaning.[22] Without saying precisely what it was,

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[15] Aughey, *Under Siege*, p. 55
[16] Lord Howe of Aberavon (Geoffrey Howe), interview with author, 27 November 2001
[17] E. Powell, 'Bombed into submission', *The Spectator*, 11 October 1986, p. 17
[18] Thatcher, p. 398; also N. Watt, 'Thatcher suggested "Cromwell solution" for Northern Ireland', *The Guardian*, 16 June 2001
[19] FitzGerald, p. 568; Lord Prior, interview with author, 27 November 2001
[20] Lord Hurd, interview with author, 4 December 2001
[21] For a comprehensive review of the different interpretations, see O'Leary, *The Politics*, pp. 220-41; for a Unionist view, see P. Smith, *Why Unionists Say No* (Belfast, n.d.); for a Republican perspective, see A. Coughlan, *Fooled Again? The Anglo-Irish Agreement and After* (Cork 1986)
[22] See 'Agreement between United Kingdom and Republic of Ireland on matters relating to Northern Ireland (Hillsborough, 15 November 1985)', Cmnd. 9690 (London 1985)

Article 1 affirms that the constitutional status of Northern Ireland can only be changed if a majority of its people are in favour; and that both governments recognise that 'the present wish... is for no change'. However, if a majority 'clearly wish for and formally consent to the establishment of a united Ireland', the two governments declare that 'they will introduce and support in the respective Parliaments legislation to give effect to that wish'. Article 2 establishes an Inter-Governmental Conference (IGC) – accompanied by a Joint Secretariat – in which the two governments were to deal with political, security and legal matters as well as the promotion of cross-border co-operation. It grants the Republic of Ireland a consultative role. Whilst the British government 'retains responsibility for the decisions and administration of government within its own jurisdiction', it is both government's duty to make 'determined efforts... to resolve any differences'. Articles 5-10 specify the issues the IGC was to consider, and notes – amongst many others – the protection of both communities' heritage and identity, the use of flags and emblems, the prevention of economic and social discrimination, a Bill of Rights, the increase of Catholics in the RUC, and the idea of mixed courts. Also, Articles 4, 5 and 10 mention the possibility of – and indeed the commitment to – a devolved cross-community settlement. However, as long as there was no agreement between the two communities on devolution, the Irish government was expected to act on behalf of the minority within the IGC: 'The Conference shall be a framework within which the Irish government may, where the interests of the minority community are significantly or especially affected, put forward views on proposals for major legislation and on major policy issues' (Article 5).

In an effort to 'sell' the agreement to the majority community, Thatcher asserted that the AIA 'confirms the status of Northern Ireland as part of the United Kingdom and recognises the legitimacy of the Unionist position', but also that it was 'the first time in a formal international agreement that the Republic has recognised this position... and has recognised that it cannot be changed except with the consent of the majority'.[23] Even so, all the points raised by Thatcher were open to challenge. Regarding the issue of status,

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[23] HC, Vol. 87, cc. 19-20, 18 November 1985

the Irish government had recognised Northern Ireland's international status on numerous occasions prior to the AIA. In 1925, London and Dublin had registered the results of the so-called Boundary Commission at the League of Nations. In 1975, the Irish and British governments – as participants of the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe – agreed to 'regard as inviolable all one another's frontiers as well as the frontiers of all States in Europe'. In addition, the Conference's Final Act stated that the signatories 'will also refrain from any demand for, or act of, seizure and usurpation of part or all of the territory of any participating State'.[24] Given that the (then) British Prime Minister Wilson signed on behalf of the 'United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland', the 1975 declaration represented a much stronger recognition of Northern Ireland by Dublin than the AIA, which failed to spell out precisely what the constitutional position of Northern Ireland was.[25] Further, even if it was correct to maintain that the Irish government had, for the first time, accepted the consent principle in international law, this provision was unlikely to be seen as anything but a minor concession. Dublin's commitment to the consent principle had been included in the Sunningdale Agreement, and it would have become part of a binding international treaty as early as 1974 if the Executive had survived (see 4.1). In fact, ever since the fall of Stormont in 1972, there had never been any doubt that the Irish government accepted the consent principle, and it was consequently reaffirmed by Irish as well as British ministers on almost very bilateral occasion. The addition that 'the present wish... is for no change' was new, yet it is hard to see how it represented anything but a statement of the obvious. There was therefore no reason for Unionists to think that they had made a 'big gain', as London argued.[26] On the contrary, the AIA's deliberate vagueness with regard to Northern Ireland's status fuelled the majority's constitutional insecurity, and the Irish government's continued refusal to remove the territorial claim from the Republic's constitution appeared to underline the ambiguity of Dublin's commitments in the AIA.

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[24] The full text of the Final Act can be found on the website of the US House of Representatives: http://www.house.gov/csce/finalact.htm

[25] To avoid any possible conflict with the territorial claim in the Irish Constitution, the Irish government's copy of the AIA referred to the UK simply as 'United Kingdom'.

[26] Lord Hurd, interview with author, 4 December 2001

Rather than focusing on Dublin's alleged concessions, the AIA needs to be understood as a forceful reiteration of British neutrality. Unionists were outraged in view of the fact that the British government had agreed to facilitate, and indeed support, the creation of a united Ireland once there was a majority of the people of Northern Ireland in favour. According to E. Haslett, it shifted 'the centre of gravity of Northern Ireland affairs from a United Kingdom to an all-Ireland setting... and puts in motion the process by which that aspiration is to be realised'.[27] Nationalists, on the other hand, started to contend that '[t]he British government is neutral in that it is no longer pro-Union'.[28] From London's perspective, the fierce reaction within Northern Ireland came as a surprise, and even an experienced politician like Howe now admits that 'the emotional strength [of Unionist opposition] shook me' (see 6.3).[29] The British government maintained that there was no reason for Unionists to worry since London's formal stance on the constitutional future of Northern Ireland had remained unchanged – and indeed, whilst the explicit reference to support for a united Ireland, and its inclusion in an international treaty, had been the most forceful expression of British neutrality to date, the continued commitment to the consent principle meant that the Union was essentially guaranteed. In fact, the principle of consent – so cherished by successive British governments – implied the notion of neutrality, which is why it could be used to suggest that there was no constitutional change imminent (to reassure Unionists), or to emphasise the possibility of a united Ireland through constitutional means (to placate Nationalists).

The AIA's only tangible constitutional implication was that it effectively ruled out the option of 'full integration'. In May 1980, Thatcher had stated that '[t]he future of the constitutional affairs of Northern Ireland is a matter for the people of Northern Ireland, this government and this parliament and no one else'.[30] Five years later, this stance had become impossible, and accordingly, Hurd was the first Northern Ireland Secretary under Thatcher to declare that '[t]he Irish government have a legitimate interest in what goes on in Northern

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[27] E. Haslett, *The Anglo-Irish Agreement. Northern Ireland Perspectives* (Belfast n.d.), p. 15
[28] Hume, quoted in P. O'Malley, *Northern Ireland. Questions of Nuance* (Belfast 1990), p. 59
[29] Lord Howe, interview with author, 27 November 2001
[30] HC, Vol. 985, c. 250, 20 May 1980

Ireland, especially in those matters which affect the minority community'.[31] Even if the 'legitimate interest' of the Irish government translated into little more than a consultative role, its recognition formally closed the door on the option of treating Northern Ireland like any part of Great Britain, and to deny that there was an Irish dimension.

Given that it was its intention to negotiate a constitutionally balanced package, London clearly failed. The idea that some vague and practically insignificant gestures in support of the consent principle would make up for the formal inclusion of Dublin in the governance of Northern Ireland illustrated how the British government continued to misapprehend the concerns of the Unionist community, the political representatives of which were far more worried about a gradual drift into joint authority than a sudden transfer of full sovereignty.[32] As an instrument of producing acceptable constitutional change, the AIA had therefore been a serious miscalculation which illustrated the continued psychological and political alienation between the British government and its supposedly natural constituency in Northern Ireland. However, in contrast to the strong reactions from the majority in Northern Ireland, Westminster's view was that nothing substantial had changed – and indeed, the AIA was possibly the purest and most comprehensive combination of traditional strategic themes, such as British neutrality, the idea that Northern Ireland was somehow different from the rest of the United Kingdom, and the desire to distance the province from the British mainland.

6.2 Holding the ring – the limits of counter-insurgency

Contrary to the popular image of the 'Iron Lady', the Thatcher period saw no significant increase in the security forces' level of force. As in earlier periods, it seemed that the self-imposed restraints of constitutionality, acceptability as well as the postulate of normality implied that, instead of being given any new tools, the security forces needed to gain efficiency within the existing framework. Prior, for instance, now declares that 'without putting the whole

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[31] HC, Vol. 81, c. 972, 26 June 1985

country on a war footing, there wasn't much else that could be done'.[33] In a similar vein, Hurd ruled out the three most popular demands for increasing the level of force – internment, shoot-to-kill, and cross-border 'hot' pursuit – as politically unacceptable, counterproductive and unrealistic.[34]

In fact, the example of Thatcher shows that even when there was an overwhelming political desire, the existing political and constitutional parameters limited the military options that could be pursued. Whilst Thatcher approved of the traditional strategic doctrine that there could be no 'military solution', and that it was 'impossible to separate entirely the security policy... from the wider political approach',[35] she nevertheless adopted an explicitly hawkish attitude towards PIRA.[36] In late 1987, she initiated a review of security policy, declaring her determination that 'nothing should be ruled out'.[37] Accordingly, the list of measures that were considered by the government included: more house searches in Nationalist areas, ending the 'right to silence', banning *Sinn Fein*, the introduction of internment, identity cards, increasing the number of soldiers, replacing the policy of police primacy, relaxing the rules on opening fire, etc.[38] When the review was concluded, in spring 1988, most of the items had disappeared from the list, and those that were put into practice – such as cutting the remission for 'terrorist prisoners', or enabling the authorities to seize bank accounts – were of a symbolic nature, or phenomena dealt with at the margins. Consequently, even Thatcher concluded that the security forces' resources 'were adequate to contain, but not as yet to defeat the IRA'.[39]

Whilst Thatcher's attitude shows that there was a perception of military stalemate on the part of London, this was by no means a novel development It resulted from the principal dilemma in devising the military strategy in

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[32] See Molyneaux, quoted in 'Endgame in Ireland? Part 1', *BBC2*, 25 June 2001
[33] Lord Prior, interview with author, 27 November 2001
[34] Lord Hurd, interview with author, 4 December 2001
[35] Thatcher, p. 384
[36] See, for example, her speech at the 1988 Conservative party conference in Brighton, where she claimed that 'this Government will never surrender to the IRA'; quoted in R. Harris, *The Collected Speeches of Margaret Thatcher* (London 1997), pp. 342-3
[37] Thatcher, p. 408
[38] Ibid.
[39] Ibid., p. 412

Northern Ireland, which consisted in the difficulty of how to reconcile the domestic notion of the rule of law with the need to conduct an effective counterinsurgency campaign. In previous periods of British military involvement, some of the attempts to resolve this dilemma included the introduction of internment, the abolition of juries for scheduled offences, and the reliance on uncorroborated evidence, mainly in the form of confessions. With the exception of internment, the British government believed that, on balance, those aberrations from 'normal' law enforcement were acceptable under the existing circumstances, provided that the measures were employed with caution and appropriate safeguards were in place (for example, a rigorous appeals procedure). In the 1982-88 period, two more attempts at resolving the dilemma were made, both of which demonstrated that – from a military point of view – the 'war' was winnable if not for the self-imposed limits on what was acceptable as a means of restoring the rule of law in Northern Ireland.

The first attempt to make the counter-insurgency campaign more effective was the systematic use of accomplice evidence. There is no evidence to suggest that the emergence of the so-called supergrasses was part of a deliberate policy, and indeed Nick Scott, who was Prior's junior minister in charge of security, stated that there was no governmental directive to that effect, but that the practice had originated in an operational decision by the RUC.[40] Nonetheless, Westminster had no objections as there was 'no reason to reject in principle evidence simply because it comes from an accomplice', and the idea was consequently embraced by the British government.[41] By 1983, the supergrass system had become the most significant means of reducing paramilitary activity. E. Moloney reported:

> The... trials... have broken up the Ulster Volunteer Force command structure in Belfast and virtually eliminated the Provisional IRA in North Belfast... The RUC says the arrests and convictions have had a devastating effect on the bombers and gunmen and have significantly contributed to a decline in violence and deaths over the past two years... The intelligence obtained from the informers has proved

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[40] T. Gifford, *Supergrasses. The Use of Accomplice Evidence in Northern Ireland* (London 1984), p. 11

[41] Hurd; HC, Vol. 70, c. 583, 20 December 1984

> invaluable in planning future counter-measures and the defections have demoralized the terrorists still at large.[42]

Despite its apparent effectiveness, the supergrass system came to an end in 1986. It was criticised for producing unsafe verdicts, undermining the integrity of the justice system and thus furthering the minority's alienation from the institutions of government.[43] In defending it, London pointed to England where accomplice eivdence had been a well-established practice. However, as Cunningham points out, there were considerable differences with the British mainland: in Northern Ireland, there was no jury; in most cases, accomplice evidence was uncorroborated; and supergrasses were offered substantial inducements, such as complete immunity from prosecution and the facilitation of resettlement abroad.[44] As a result, many of those who had originally been convicted were acquitted on appeal, and the system gradually imploded.

The second attempt at refining the military campaign became known as shoot-to-kill. There were several occasions on which the security forces clearly exceeded the level of force that would have been necessary to make arrests, the most prominent of which was a series of incidents during which six unarmed Catholic men (five of whom had paramilitary connections) were shot dead by an RUC undercover unit. It is unlikely, however, that London initiated, or explicitly agreed to, a policy of planned assassinations. At government level, 'shoot-to-kill' was repeatedly rejected for moral as well as practical reasons. Prior, for instance, declared that '[w]e must not fall into the trap of acting in any way which at any time would be against the law... which we are proud to uphold in the whole of the United Kingdom'.[45] Furthermore, he believed that 'shoot to kill' would have been counterproductive: '[W]e knew that everytime the security forces did kill someone, there was going to be a further outbreak of terrorism from somewhere [else]'.[46] At the same time, though, there was little surprise at the occurrence of the shootings, and

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[42] E. Moloney, 'Will Supergrass sow a bitter harvest?', *The Times*, 13 September 1983
[43] See M. Holland, 'Using tainted evidence', *New Statesman*, 23 September 1983, p. 9
[44] M. Cunningham, *British Government Policy in Northern Ireland, 1969-2000* (Manchester 2001), p. 58
[45] HC, Vol. 50, c. 518, 8 December 1983

equally, there was no doubt that the security forces had acted inappropriately. Their actions were regarded as an inevitable, and ultimately unavoidable, reaction to the justice system's inability to achieve convictions in court. Referring to the incidents in 1982, Gowrie was 'certain that ministers were covering for excessive, though understandable, reactions by the police'.[47] Indeed, whilst no one at Westminster would have considered to make 'shoot to kill' an official government policy, there was a degree of understanding, if not sympathy, for the security forces which – according to Hurd – 'were expected to play by rules which the IRA would have never dreamt about'.[48] As NIO minister Richard Needham put it: 'We knew who was guilty. But when the administration of justice breaks down, the police either sit in their barracks and play cards, or they take the law into their own hands'.[49]

As long as it remained the exception rather than the rule, 'shoot to kill' therefore never raised the issue of political control, which one would have expected if the security forces acted contrary to government policy. In fact, Prior was happy to refer to the security forces' operational independence, declaring that he did not 'dictate security to the security forces'.[50] After leaving office, he revealed that government ministers never 'asked specifically to be told when the SAS were going to be used'.[51] As a result, police and army had considerable leeway – and, arguably, the government's tacit agreement – in initiating operations that were likely to violate the principle of minimum force. This was particularly true when the security forces managed to produce 'clean kills', that is, shootings that *appeared* to be justified under the given circumstances, and that would consequently not provoke any hostile reaction either from the minority in Northern Ireland or from public opinion generally.[52]

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[46] Lord Prior, interview with author, 27 November 2001
[47] Lord Gowrie, interview with author, 13 December 2001
[48] Lord Hurd, interview with author, 4 December 2001
[49] Sir Richard Needham, interview with author, 14 November 2001
[50] Prior; HC, Vol. 50, c. 519, 8 December 1983
[51] Prior, quoted in Urban, p. 166
[52] Ibid., pp. 164-5

The security forces' ability to avoid civilian casualties was a significant factor that enabled the government to ignore the issue. In contrast to the late 1970s, when the SAS's presence needed to be scaled down after a number of controversial ambushes (see 5.2), there were no efforts to inhibit the SAS's increased activity from 1987.[53] From a strategic point of view, the security forces' increased sophistication at employing 'contact' intelligence in order to 'take out' experienced PIRA units on active service served as an effective deterrent. According to one minister: 'If you really want to bring about a change in terrorist behaviour, you have to create a climate whereby they are frightened to commit crime because they fear either apprehension... or being caught in a cross-fire situation whereby they get killed'.[54] One might therefore contend that in addition to the immediate value of eliminating a number of accomplished PIRA operators, the capability to carry through 'clean kills' communicated the superiority of British military capabilities in a very powerful way. In fact, the tactic may have added to PIRA's perception of military stalemate, and its consequent realisation that a 'military solution' to the conflict had become impossible.[55]

Regarding the most important political development in the 1982-88 period, the conclusion of the AIA, the implications for British security policy turned out to be negligible. From Westminster's perspective, one of the main reasons for entering into negotiations about the AIA had been to convince the Irish government that its military activities needed to be co-ordinated with, and integrated into, the British counterinsurgency effort, so that the vulnerabilities of having an open land border (which handicapped the security forces but not the paramilitaries) and two separate jurisdictions would be neutralised (see 6.1). As it turned out, increased security co-operation was the least significant outcome of the Anglo-Irish process. While some of London's more ambitious aims – such as a joint security zone around the

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[53] For example, the killing of eight PIRA members who were about to attack an RUC station in Loughgall, Co. Armagh, in May 1987; the shooting dead of three PIRA operatives on a mission in Gibraltar in March 1988; the killing of three PIRA near Drumnakilly, Co. Tyrone, in August 1988.
[54] Sir John Wheeler, interview with author, 18 February 2002
[55] See Smith, *Fighting for Ireland?*, p. 215

border – had to be abandoned relatively early,[56] the British government hoped that the AIA would strengthen Dublin's resolve to counter Republican activity, increase its efforts to monitor movements at the border, and facilitate the co-operation between the security forces of both countries. Accordingly, Thatcher anticipated progress 'in such matters as threat assessment... technical co-operation, training of personnel and operational resources... [and the] fuller and faster exchange of information, especially pre-emptive intelligence which helps to prevent acts of terrorism'.[57] With the possible exception of improvements in the communication between the two police forces, however, the majority of Westminster's expectations could never be realised.[58] One explanation for this can be found in London's failure to act upon its commitment to reform the Northern Ireland justice system, the review of which Thatcher had allegedly promised to FitzGerald as a *quid pro quo* for the facilitation of extradition and border security.[59] Yet Dublin's lack of vigour with regard to security co-operation also related to the difficulty of mobilising the forces of law and order when there was no emergency in one's own jurisdiction. When the British government recognised that the absence of a similar threat had produced 'a different attitude' towards security in the Republic,[60] London eventually abandoned its hopes and concluded that it was unrealistic to expect that 'simply by signing an agreement... a magic wand would be provided whereby terrorists would pack up their tents and walk away'.[61]

Like the Irish government's reluctance *vis-à-vis* border security, London was slow to accept the logic of the Dublin's arguments when it came to the implementation of the measures the Irish government had insisted on as a means of ending the minority's alienation from the institutions of law and order. Many of Dublin's proposals were ruled out by London because they

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[56] Thatcher, p. 398
[57] HC, Vol. 87, c. 749, 26 November 1985
[58] For a contemporary evaluation of Anglo-Irish security co-operation, see 'After Enniskillen', *The Economist,* 14 November 1987, pp. 25-6
[59] FitzGerald, quoted in 'Courting trouble', *The Economist*, 3 October 1987, p. 33; for London's justification of the Diplock court system, see HC, Vol. 107, cc. 1082-3, 16 December 1986; for a summary of the extradition issue, see T. Hadden, K. Boyle, *The Anglo-Irish Agreement. Commentary, Text and Official Review* (London 1989), pp. 59-64
[60] King, quoted in R. Ford, 'King says Garda needs help to tackle terrorism', *The Times*, 4 September 1986

interfered with British sovereignty (mixed courts, the joint policing of Nationalist areas),[62] or – more straightforwardly – because they were seen as unacceptable to the majority (a radical shake-up of the RUC, the abolition of the UDR).[63] When Irish proposals were implemented at all (a Code of Conduct for the RUC, improvements in the security forces' complaints system), London resisted the open symbolism which Dublin thought necessary in order to convince the minority that the AIA was the beginning of a new era. Moreover, in contrast to FitzGerald's claim that Ulsterisation had now 'reached a plateau',[64] the AIA failed to have any significant impact on the overall balance between external and local security forces. In fact, Figure 3 shows that Ulsterisation had reached a 'plateau' of between 14,000 and 15,000 men as early as 1978, five years before the Anglo-Irish process began. With some modifications of the regiment's training and vetting procedures, the only tangible change concerned the UDR,[65] yet it would be far-fetched to argue that the traditional emphasis on professionalisation was an adequate substitute for the more radical demands which had been advanced by the Irish side.

The AIA's actual provisions aside, it is frequently argued that the emergence of the Agreement exemplified a newfound willingness to defy the majority community. In this regard, Westminster's performance is favourably compared to that of 1974, when Unionist opposition had compelled London to abandon the Executive.[66] To explain why this analogy is misplaced, it is necessary to compare the political and military circumstances in both instances. As in 1974, the British government could not see how the AIA had broken the traditional principle that any new system of government needed to be acceptable to both sides. London regarded the AIA as a mere modification of Direct Rule – with all 'decisions north of the border [remaining] a matter for the United Kingdom'[67] – and there was no question of 'selling out' the

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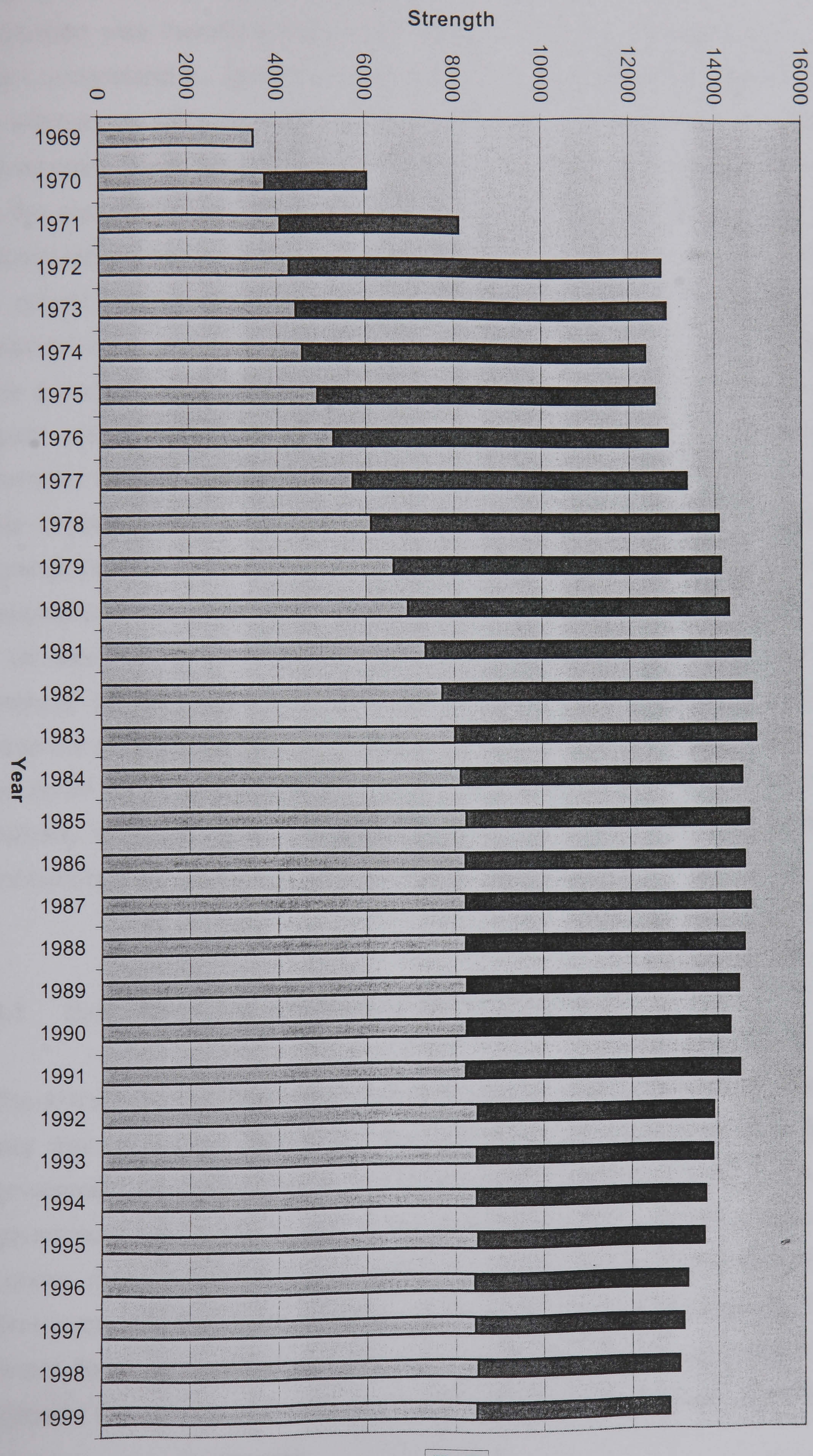
[61] King; HC, Vol. 119, c. 198, 7 July 1987
[62] Sir Robert Andrew, interview with author, 21 November 2001
[63] See FitzGerald, p. 516
[64] Ibid., p. 552.
[65] Ryder, *The Ulster*, pp. 213-5
[66] See Ruane, *The dynamics*, pp. 132-5
[67] Thatcher; HC, Vol. 86, c. 681, 14 November 1985

Figure 3: Strength of local security forces, 1969-99
Source: see Appendix



majority community. Rather than because of substantive objections, Unionist resistance was therefore thought to have resulted from the fact that 'they didn't understand it... [and] because of the way it had been negotiated' (that is, without any prior consultation of the Unionists).[68] As in 1974, the British government expected that Unionist reluctance would be overcome as soon as the agreement was seen to be working, and once the initial outrage had calmed down (see 4.1). In 1974, however, the majority community managed to render the province ungovernable within months of the Executive's establishment, and even before the Sunningdale Agreement was translated into a formal treaty. Back then, essential services had effectively broken down, and it was believed that to contain the turmoil would require an unlimited military operation, thus resulting in a civil war (see 4.2). In 1985, this situation never occurred. Although there was a sustained campaign against the AIA – which included marches, symbolic strikes, boycotts and the resignation of all Unionist MPs (prompting by-elections in 15 constituencies) – Unionist resistance to the AIA clearly failed to achieve the same level of intensity as the stoppage in 1974. As Needham explained: '[W]e kept the essential services running, and we did not lose the support of the police, [so] we could continue to govern'.[69] Hence, the issue of defying the Unionists militarily never arose for the simple reason that there was no necessity to contemplate a 'military solution'.

6.3 Exclusion – the ambiguities of marginalisation

The AIA's impact on Anglo-Irish relations was tangible, albeit in a more subtle way than expected. Ruling out the option of 'full integration', the British government conceded that – in the absence of power-sharing – the Irish government had a role to play in the governance of the province (see 6.1). London made it clear that any settlement had to include some form of Irish dimension, and that there could be no return to Mason's attempts at making Direct Rule semi-permanent. In this regard, the British government had followed the agenda of Dublin and the SDLP, both of which had bargained for

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[68] Lord Hurd, interview with author, 4 December 2001

the formalisation of the Irish dimension and an end to the idea of an internal settlement. Even though London and Dublin continued to be far from the durable accommodation which London had envisaged,[70] one might therefore contend that the AIA provided an institutional foundation from which a lasting accommodation could emerge. One might argue that like a marriage, the AIA had welded together the two governments in a contractual framework from which it was difficult to withdraw, and which set limits on the amount of disagreement one could afford. Even Thatcher, who became increasingly critical of the accord once she had left office, maintained that 'it never seemed worth pulling out of the agreement altogether because this would have created problems not only with the Republic but, more importantly, with broad international opinion as well'.[71] In that sense, it literally forced the two governments to work out their differences, and it would – in time – produce 'an instinctive feeling that when things go wrong, [one] immediately gets together and decides what to do about it'.[72]

Even if the AIA's immediate impact on Anglo-Irish relations was slim, the formulation of British political strategy in the 1982-88 period cannot be understood without reference to its origins, conclusion and implementation. For example, it is sometimes maintained that the AIA aimed at facilitating the emergence of the longstanding objective of British government strategy in Northern Ireland, namely a devolved cross-community settlement. On the Nationalist side, so the argument goes, the AIA would have reconciled the Catholics with the institutions of government, thus strengthening constitutional Nationalism and the role of the SDLP as the voice of the minority, whilst stopping the growth of *Sinn Fein* as an electoral force.[73] On the Unionist side, Dublin's inclusion in the government of the province would have provided an effective incentive for Unionists to agree to power-sharing as devolved powers would be excluded from the scope of the IGC.[74]

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[69] Sir Richard Needham, interview with author, 14 November 2001
[70] See, for example, T.E. Utley, 'The torments of a bad treaty', *The Times,* 1 March 1988
[71] Thatcher, p. 413
[72] Lord Howe, interview with author, 27 November 2001
[73] O'Duffy, 'The Price', pp. 120-1

To understand the significance of devolution as a reason for concluding the AIA, it is necessary to examine the motivational dynamics on both sides. For the Irish government, to support and strengthen constitutional Nationalism was a major stimulus. After the hunger strikes, there was a real fear that *Sinn Fein* would overtake the SDLP as the main Nationalist party in Northern Ireland and make substantial gains south of the border. Consequently, the purpose of the so-called New Ireland Forum in 1983-84, in which the main constitutional Nationalist parties worked out suggestions for an agreed settlement, was to demonstrate that constitutional Nationalism was capable of providing a viable alternative to the armed struggle. FitzGerald's repeated warnings about the dangers of *Sinn Fein*'s electoral rise (and the related demand for ending Catholic alienation in Northern Ireland) were genuine, even if Dublin sometimes exaggerated 'the perceived menace' in order to create a renewed sense of urgency on the British side.[75] Equally, it was the declared aim of the Irish government to create 'a powerful encouragement to Unionists to join with Nationalists in a devolved government'.[76] This, Dublin maintained, could be achieved by involving Irish ministers in the government of Northern Ireland, the powers of which would be cut back once a devolved settlement was agreed between the representatives of the two communities.

Whilst enhancing the prospect of devolution was therefore regarded as an important objective on the Irish side, the same could not necessarily be said for London – even if some British negotiators (apparently encouraged by the successful conclusion of the Belfast Agreement) now argue that it had been its purpose all along.[77] On the British side, devolution continued to be the long-term aspiration, yet there was a conviction that its internal *sine qua non* (that is, power-sharing) 'had not worked [and that we] needed to bring in the Irish government to look after the interests of the minority'; in that sense, the AIA was seen as 'almost an alternative to power-sharing'.[78] Consequently, some of Dublin's arguments fell on deaf ears. First, the political advance of

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[74] P. Brooke, 'Anglo-Irish Agreement gives Catholics equality of esteem', *New Statesman*, 10 October 1986, p.8
[75] FitzGerald, p. 529
[76] Ibid., p. 520
[77] See D. Goodall, 'Actually it's all working out almost exactly to plan', *Parliamentary Brief*, 5:6 (1998), p. 54

the Republican movement had simply not caused the same amount of anxiety in London as it had in Dublin. Even though Prior described Sands' election as a 'profound shock' for the British government, he added that its impact was 'not very great in political terms'.[79] Hurd believed that 'to build up the SDLP as an official spokesman of the minority... [was] a motive, but it was a secondary motive'.[80] Furthermore, the notion of providing an incentive for the Unionists to agree to power-sharing was alien to the British government. As shown above (see 6.1), London was sensitive about the extent of Unionist discontent *any* Anglo-Irish agreement would produce, and its attitude towards Dublin's idea of 'encouraging' the Unionists to share power with Nationalists was therefore one of scepticism. As Mallaby explained:

> [It] was not an active purpose in our minds, and I think it would have been a risky purpose to give ourselves because it was far from certain that it would have a positive effect. The effect could have been to turn [the Unionists] against any kind of negotiation for a very long time.[81]

Instead of deliberately worsening the status quo for the majority community, the British government set out to produce what was described as a 'balanced package': 'We could not afford to swap the alienation of the minority community for the alienation of the majority. A middle course had to be found'.[82] While Hurd, in an attempt to compensate the Unionists for the involvement of the Irish government, at one point even contemplated the return to an exclusively Unionist administration within Northern Ireland,[83] London's efforts to balance the agreement concentrated on obtaining better security co-operation (which was believed to be in the Unionist interest) and resisting some of Dublin's far-reaching demands, such as the abolition of the UDR (see 6.2).

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[78] Sir Robert Andrew, interview with author, 21 November 2001
[79] Lord Prior, interview with author, 27 November 2001
[80] Lord Hurd, interview with author, 4 December 2001
[81] Sir Christopher Mallaby, interview with author, 15 November 2001
[82] Prior, p. 243
[83] Hurd's diaries, quoted in M. Stuart, *Douglas Hurd. The Public Servant* (London 1998), p. 138

One more observation appears to reinforce the impression that it was unlikely that the British government intended the AIA to be an instrument with which to face down Unionist opposition to power-sharing. Considering Dublin's initial demands for 'joint authority' and a thorough reform of the security forces, the British side genuinely believed that they had negotiated a 'fair deal' for the Unionists. London was hardly worried about the formalisation of consultation (see 6.1), and it regarded some of the more controversial commitments in the AIA as 'paper tigers'. For example, only two days after the signing, Hurd's successor, Tom King, made it clear that there would 'never' be mixed courts with judges from both countries – despite a clear reference in the agreement in which both sides agreed to consider this possibility.[84] In short, London assumed that it had achieved the minimalist agreement for which it had strived, and that Unionist fears were therefore unfounded. As a result, most individuals within the British government were surprised by the strong Unionist opposition to the AIA. Whilst it was generally anticipated that Paisley's DUP would come out against the agreement, it had been expected that the UUP would eventually acquiesce to it, thus guaranteeing tacit support from the largest Unionist party. As Lord Lyell, who was a junior minister under Hurd and King, stated: 'All the members of the Conservative government, and 90 per cent of Conservative MPs were startled... They were saying: the Union Jack is there, they get these subsidies. What are they upset about?'[85] Thus, instead of being a shrewd plan to weaken the Unionists' resolve, it appears more likely that – despite its cautious approach when compared to Dublin – the British government simply underestimated the constitutional sensitivities of the majority community, and that it overrated the extent to which the Unionists would trust London as a guardian of their interests.

Whilst it is therefore mistaken to imply that London *intended* the AIA to worsen the Unionists' position, most of the ideas that had been been put forward by the Irish government during the AIA's negotiation were nevertheless co-opted by the British side *after* the AIA had been concluded. Any decrease in electoral support for *Sinn Fein*, for example, was portrayed

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[84] '"Parroting" critics are attacked by King', *The Times*, 18 November 1985

as a direct consequence of the agreement that '[a]ny intelligent Unionist must take comfort from'.[86] More significantly, the British government started to hold out the prospect of a devolved cross-community settlement as a way of reducing the responsibilities of the IGC. Shocked by the strength of Unionist opposition, Thatcher stated that 'the people of Northern Ireland can get rid of the inter-governmental conference by agreeing to devolved government'.[87] And in February 1986, King declared that it was London's 'ambition' to reduce the responsibilities of the IGC and extend the powers of any devolved government 'as widely as we can'.[88] Indeed, to entice the Unionists to participate in talks about devolution became the principal aim of Westminster's political efforts in the post-Agreement period. In doing so, Thatcher and King not only admitted that London had failed to achieve its objective (to create an inter-governmental framework that would ease the operation of Direct Rule), but they also hinted at a return to the traditional aspiration of devolution and power-sharing. In the post-1985 period, the AIA would therefore assume the function London had originally been reluctant to pursue: it served as an incentive for the political representatives of the majority community to overcome their alleged intransigence and address Nationalist concerns more effectively that hitherto.

Regarding the evolution of political strategy, the second significant development in the 1982-88 period concerned *Sinn Fein*. At first glance, the 1980s represented the climax of Westminster's efforts to marginalise the Republican movement. Unlike earlier periods of British involvement, the representatives of *Sinn Fein* were now not portrayed as 'doves' or 'moderates', whose conversion towards peaceful politics had to be encouraged, but – on the contrary – as an inextricable part of the Republican strategy of 'the Armalite and the ballot box', according to which the latter sought to legitimise and strengthen the former. Consequently, the British government made no difference between the two: at best, *Sinn Fein* was

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[85] Lord Lyell, interview with author, 8 November 2001
[86] King; HC, Vol. 93, c. 156, 4 March 1986
[87] O'Leary and McGarry are correct in asserting that Thatcher's comment was misleading as, within the terms of the agreement, devolved government could reduce the scope of the IGC, but not replace it completely; see O'Leary, *The Politics*, p. 234
[88] A. Bevins, 'Breakthrough on Ulster deadlock', *The Times*, 26 February 1986

irrelevant; at worst, it was – like PIRA – 'just an enemy'.[89] The list of measures that were designed to exclude *Sinn Fein* from the political process included the denial of access to ministers, the introduction of a pledge that required local councillors to renounce the use of violence for political purposes, and the 1988 broadcasting ban, which meant that the voices of the representatives of twelve organisations – including *Sinn Fein* – could not be broadcast, except during election campaigns and when they spoke on constituency matters.[90]

Even so, the Republican movement's decision to engage in electoral politics created a number of practical difficulties, so that the policy of marginalisation could never be practised as consistently as London hoped it could. For instance, London was compelled to recognise that, whilst being the political wing of PIRA, the representatives of *Sinn Fein* – as local councillors or MPs – made consistent efforts to represent the problems of their constituents. Thus, while Prior hoped 'that nobody will pay any attention to what its members say',[91] he admitted that 'all the elected Sinn Fein representatives have had contact with government officials at local level on a range of constituency matters'.[92] Further, if the British government wanted to disprove the Republican claim that 'it has made little serious effort to bring real jobs to nationalist areas',[93] Westminster needed to co-operate with community leaders who, in many Republican strongholds, were either Catholic clergy or members of *Sinn Fein*. Even though efforts were made to involve the Catholic Church as closely as possible (see 6.4), Needham arrived at the conclusion that some sort of consultation with Adams was inevitable if one wanted to proceed with the plans for a development area in West Belfast – and indeed, he approached Adams despite his knowledge that to do so was against the existing rules.[94] In fact, most members of the government were convinced that 'sooner or later it had to be done' – that is, to talk to *Sinn Fein*

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[89] Lord Hurd, interview with author, 4 December 2001
[90] See 'Whose oxygen', *The Economist*, 22 October 1988, p. 41
[91] HC, Vol. 46, c. 551, 21 July 1983
[92] HC, Vol. 34, c. 1059, 23 December 1982
[93] Sinn Fein, *Hillsborough – The Balance Sheet, 1985-88* (Dublin 1989) p. 10
[94] Sir Richard Needham, interview with author, 17 November 2001

– but refused to break the official convention about ministerial contacts with representatives of the Republican movement.[95]

Indeed, a close reading of the available sources shows that London's attitude towards *Sinn Fein* had always been more pragmatic than its rhetorical postures suggested. As early as 1985, Scott pointed out:

> It would be possible to move from the government's present position in one of two directions: either towards the prescription of Sinn Fein... or to give Sinn Fein equality of treatment as elected representatives. For the moment we believe that... to draw as firm a distinction as possible between those who advocate constitutional politics and those who advocate violence... is the best way forward. However, I freely accept that it is a matter for political judgment, and that judgment could change from time to time according to the circumstances that prevail.[96]

Referring to 'changing circumstances', Scott implied that the policy of exclusion could be reversed if PIRA decided to end its military campaign. As, for most of the 1982-88 period, there had been no signs that the Republican side had any intention of doing so, Westminster saw the continued marginalisation of *Sinn Fein* as a practical necessity, not least in order to exert further pressure on PIRA. In this respect, London's approach was far more flexible than that of the Irish government. Granting *Sinn Fein's* representatives access to government officials was said to be something that 'would never happen in Dublin, no matter how many votes [Adams] won in an election'.[97] In Dublin's view, the policy of exclusion was the AIA's *raison d'être* – it was a matter of principle, not a temporary arrangement that 'could change from time to time' (see above).

Towards the end of the 1982-88 period, it became clear that the Republican leadership was prepared to subject its strategy to a fundamental reassessment. The Republican side's precise motives for doing so are beyond the scope of this study, but it is possible to point out some of the dynamics that may have contributed to this change. First, the Republicans'

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[95] Lord Gowrie, interview with author, 13 December 2001
[96] Scott; HC, Vol. 81, c. 1025, 26 June 1985
[97] M. Holland, 'Closing ranks for a united Ireland', *The Times,* 16 March 1983

perception of political and military stalemate was induced by the security forces' success in containing PIRA, which suggested that a 'military solution' was impossible (see 6.2). Second, it became obvious that there was a contradiction between the electoral aspirations of *Sinn Fein* and the need to maintain PIRA's military campaign. The potentially harmful effect of military operations on the electoral chances of *Sinn Fein* – especially when such attacks involved the klling of civilians – was admitted relatively early,[98] but it was fully realised only in the late 1980s. After the attack on the Remembrance Day ceremony at Enniskillen (Co. Fermanagh) in November 1987, for example, Adams acknowledged that 'our efforts to broaden our base have most certainly been upset in all the areas we have selected for expansion'.[99] Third, the positive reception of the AIA amongst Nationalists furthered the domestic as well as international isolation of the movement. Accordingly, *Sinn Fein* admitted that the agreement was 'good for the SDLP in party terms, helping [SDLP deputy leader] Seamus Mallon to take Newry and Armagh and reducing the Sinn Fein vote'.[100] Fourth, London's consistent refusal to make any amendments to the treaty challenged traditional Republican assumptions about the so-called 'Unionist veto' on constitutional change. Both Robert Andrew and Alan Goodison (the British ambassador in Dublin) learned from sources close to the Republican leadership that the AIA had led Adams to consider the possibility that the British government was now prepared to 'stand up to the Unionists', and that a political solution might therefore be possible.[101] Indeed, King now confirms that the British government was fully aware of the shift in Republican thinking:

> It was... towards the end of my time that we got the first signs that they had second thoughts about the Anglo-Irish Agreement. We had made it clear that this wasn't the prelude to a British withdrawal, that we were entirely robust on the security field, and that Article 1 [of the AIA] meant what it said about continuing to be part of the UK if that was what the population wanted... [In early 1988] Hume then launched into opening up those discussions [with Adams]... I didn't know the details, but I knew that he was talking to them. At that time, the first queries

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[98] See Adams, quoted in R. Ford, 'Us versus the rest, Sinn Fein says', *The Times*, 27 May 1983

[99] Adams, quoted in Mallie, *The Fight*, p. 59

[100] Sinn Fein, *Hillsborough*, p. 12

[101] Sir Robert Andrew, interview with author, 19 November 2001; Sir Alan Goodison, interview with author, 21 November 2001

> started to come through as to what our position really meant, and I was under no doubt that Father [Alec] Reid and the Clonard [Monastery in West Belfast] were involved in talks with the IRA.[102]

One might therefore conclude that London understood the change within the Republican movement's position to be potentially significant. Its political reponse to the development, however, would only become obvious in the following period.

6.4 New deal – the advent of fair employment

In the first term of Thatcher's Conservative government, Northern Ireland had largely escaped the consequences of Thatcherite monetarism, including – above all – drastic decreases in public spending and the consequent minimisation of the state's role in the economy (see 5.4). Even though it appeared as if, in the following years, some of Thatcher's concepts had eventually found their way across the Irish Sea, traditional influences on the formulation of economic policy in Northern Ireland remained paramount. Most importantly, this meant that the province continued to be considered as a special case to which national economic policies would not necessarily apply. As Prior explained in the House of Commons:

> There may be pockets of unemployment in Great Britain which are as high as the average in Northern Ireland, but... they are also accompanied by a degree of violence which, thank heavens, is not present in Great Britain. There are exceptional circumstances and conditions in Northern Ireland which should make the House sympathetic to the special treatment that we are seeking to accord.[103]

In short, the principle of 'peace through prosperity' still applied, and even strong supporters of Thatcher's economic policies on the British mainland – such as Rhodes Boyson, an NIO minister in the years 1984-86 – asserted that 'despite the fact that I adhere to my monetarist views... we must face the

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[102] Lord King (Tom King), interview with author, 27 November 2001
[103] HC, Vol. 39, c. 872, 23 March 1983

fact that, unless we can regenate the economy, the transfer of money must continue'.[104]

Still, the uncompromising implementation of monetarism in Great Britain – accompanied by record levels of unemployment and social unrest – raised the question as to why a province which, in British eyes, had always been the main financial beneficiary of the Union should now be excluded from the harsher dictates of a national effort. The increasing disparities between Great Britain, where the free market was referred to as the ultimate authority, and Northern Ireland, where subsidies continued to flow regardless, was not missed by the national press, which regularly reported about the province where Thatcherism had 'lost the courage of its own convictions'.[105] Pressure also came from within the British government, the representatives of which were forced to explain the necessity of spending cuts in Great Britain whilst an unlimited amount of British taxpayers' money seemed to be wasted in Northern Ireland. Needham, for example, recalled that '[v]isiting British politicians and civil servants cast envious eyes over the scale and quality of the Housing Executive's efforts'.[106] Hence, whilst Northern Ireland was both different and insignificant enough to allow for an exception from the national economic policy of monetarism, the stringent execution of Thatcherite economics on the British mainland meant that London was under increasing pressure to explain why the same principles were not applied in Northern Ireland. Rather than guiding the formulation of economic policy in Northern Ireland directly, the principal influence of Thatcherism was therefore an indirect one: it created a consensus which forced the British government to justify its economic policy in Northern Ireland, and it prompted the NIO to increase its efforts to ensure 'value for money' in locating public resources.

In the following, three examples will illustrate how the government attempted to reconcile the pressure for more efficiency with the paradigm of 'peace through prosperity'. First, one of the main planks of Thatcher's economic reforms was the retreat from state involvement in industry. Consequently,

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[104] HC, Vol. 87, c. 824, 26 November 1985
[105] 'Dependence or bust', *The Economist,* 2 June 1984, p. 43
[106] R. Needham, *Battling for Peace* (Belfast 1998), p. 136

most of the companies that had been renationalised in the 1970s were privatised regardless of the social cost, and even where potential buyers could be found, the factories were sometimes closed down if the transfer into private ownership would have required the provision of additional public resources. In Northern Ireland, privatisation was handled with more care, first by delaying its introduction, and then by lessening its social impact. When the province's two leading employers (Harland & Wolff and Short Brothers), were eventually offered to the private sector, in 1988, disproportionate amounts of public money (£850m in the case of Short)[107] were written off to ensure that the companies would not need to close down. In contrast to the British mainland, the primary objective here was 'to maintain jobs in Northern Ireland'.[108] Second, in the same year, the government abolished the Standard Capital Grant scheme, which had been the main instrument in supporting private investment in the industrial sector. Explaining the decision, the British government argued that the scheme was inefficient because it assisted companies that would have invested in Northern Ireland in any case, and failed to apply to others (for example, in the services sector) for which financial support was essential in determining the decision to locate in the province. It was replaced by a series of new schemes that appeared to underline the ideas of 'selectivity and targeting' which London had made its foremost consideration in reorganising the grant structure.[109] Still, in what would have been unimaginable on the British mainland, even companies that were clearly not viable continued to be supported when there were jobs at stake. As Viggers recalled:

> One company came back about every five years, saying that it was about to close and needed more money. There would be enormous social pressure, and that the community couldn't afford to lose these number of jobs, and it was an important prestigious project. So, in the end, we subsidised it again.[110]

Third, whilst the power of the trade unions was drastically curbed on the British mainland, Thatcher's controversial trade union legislation was

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[107] Peter Viggers, interview with author, 28 November 2001
[108] Ibid.
[109] Viggers; HC, Vol. 128, c. 292, 8 March 1988
[110] Peter Viggers, interview with author, 28 November 2001

introduced in Northern Ireland only with much delay. Some parts were not transferred to the province at all.[111] To some extent, this was related to the problem of finding parliamentary time for Northern Ireland legislation. More significantly, though, even the Thatcher government acknowledged that the trade unions in the province had had a stabilising influence, and that 'it was very important to keep the trade unions as a pillar for good'.[112]

The need to justify public expenditure, and the consequent realisation that it was neither sufficient nor possible to solve the province's problems through an ever increasing amount of public subsidies, also resulted in efforts to make the economic instrument more responsive to the overall strategy. Whereas in earlier periods, economic policy was related to the objective only in the most general sense – such as by saying that the creation of employment would contribute to stability and peace (see 5.4) – every measure of economic policy was now explained with regard to its anticipated strategic impact. In Republican strongholds, for example, economic policy aimed at undermining the power of the PIRA and *Sinn Fein.* One would therefore try to build up other sources of authority, such as the Catholic clergy or the SDLP. Accordingly, specific measures, such as the creation of regeneration grants and the maintenance of government sponsored employment schemes, were designed to 'provide the SDLP and their leader with the proof they required to show their people that co-operation with the British government could bring results'.[113] The Republican movement's decision to engage in economic and social agitation, however, created a dilemma. On the one hand, Republican-led co-operatives created jobs and alleviated poverty in some of the areas that had been worst affected by the conflict. On the other hand, supporting those initiatives would have helped the Republicans to strengthen their hold over the population, and it would have generated money for their political as well as military activities. Even though it appeared to back up *Sinn Fein*'s claim that the government had no real interest in creating jobs in Republican areas (see 6.3), London was therefore determined not to support Republican-led ventures, such as the

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[111] Gaffikin, p. 88
[112] Sir Richard Needham, interview with author, 14 November 2001
[113] Needham, p. 196

Conway Mill in West Belfast (which was refused a job creation grant in 1985).[114] From a strategic point of view, this decision was entirely coherent: if Northern Ireland was excepted from the dictates of economic Thatcherism, it was because economic policy was regarded as a strategic instrument. Thus, applying the economic instrument in a way that contradicted the overall aim of the strategy would have defeated its purpose, and consequently, there would have been no justification for why Northern Ireland should be treated differently from similarly deprived areas in the North of England or Scotland.

The most significant development in the 1982-88 period concerned the issue of fair employment. The government maintained that the Fair Employment Act (1989) originated in a 1985 analysis of labour market statistics by the Northern Ireland Department of Economic Development (DED), which showed the continued existence of significant differences between the two communities in terms of employment and income. This insight prompted Hurd to ask the DED to 'consider how the current approach to equality of opportunity in employment could be made more comprehensive, consistent and effective'.[115] According to London, there was therefore 'a straight line of causation from the government's statistics of 1985 to the legislation' that was introduced in 1988.[116] Whilst this account may be factually correct, it nevertheless conceals the underlying pressures that convinced the government to take action in an area in which it had previously been extremely reluctant to embark upon substantial reforms (see 5.4). In this regard, Needham's assessment is both honest and revealing:

> There was no doubt that the British government had to introduce legislation to show the world (or rather Irish-America and Dublin) that employment practices were unbiased. The very existence of new legislation showed the power that a combined Dublin-Washington alliance had over a British government. I would need persuading that the Prime Minister [Thatcher] instinctively supported such an interfering law that was alien to her free-market instincts... Without outside legislative pressures the practices would probably have remained the same in perpetuity.[117]

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[114] DeBaroid, pp. 286-7
[115] Hurd, quoted in McCormack, p. 45
[116] Viggers; HC, Vol. 136, c. 698, 1 July 1988
[117] Needham, pp. 202-3, 204

'Outside pressures' primarily originated in the United States, where the Irish National Caucus had conceived the so-called MacBride Principles that called for an increase of Catholic employees (in companies where they were underrepresented) as well as affirmative action programmes.[118] Starting in 1984, the MacBride campaign aimed at making American investment in Northern Ireland conditional upon the adoption of the principles, and it succeeded in convincing a series of US state legislatures and city councils that their respective pension funds should not be invested in the stocks of companies that refused to insist on the implementation of the code. The British government strongly opposed the MacBride campaign, arguing that it would lead to disinvestment, and that the principles amounted to 'reverse discrimination', which was illegal under existing British legislation. Also, according to an NIO spokesman, the principles were 'unnecessary since Northern Ireland has its own Fair Employment Act [of 1976] and agency'.[119]

In contrast to Needham's assertion, the initial reaction of Dublin as well as their leading Irish-American allies in the US Congress was one of scepticism, as the Irish National Caucus was regarded as a Republican front organisation.[120] By 1987, however, the campaign had gained so much momentum amongst Nationalists that the Irish government eventually decided to support it,[121] and reforms of the existing fair employment legislation consequently became one of the central issues in the IGC.[122] Whereas in 1987, London still believed that it was possible to address the issue by publishing a revised guide with recommendations on how to implement the existing rules, the British government concluded in the following year that new legislation was necessary to fend off the combined pressures of Dublin and Irish-America. Accordingly, both King and Viggers

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[118] For the 1986 (revised) version of the MacBride Principles, see McCormack, pp. 42-3
[119] NIO spokesman, quoted in M. Farrell, 'Does Ulster need "reverse discrimination" on jobs?', *The Listener*, 24 September 1987, p. 6
[120] 'The Colour Green', *The Economist,* 3 May 1986, p. 37
[121] J. Cooney, 'Jobs: can King win over America?', *The Times,* 19 September 1987
[122] See NIO, *Developments*, p. 3

now confirm that Dublin's as well as Irish-American lobbying was crucial in impressing upon the British government the need for stronger legislation.[123]

The Fair Employment Act (1989) represented a significant change in governmental attitudes towards the issue of communal inequality. For the first time, London acknowledged that the material inequality between the two communities was a legitimate grievance that needed to be addressed if stability was to emerge. Also, the British government conceded that the perception of disadvantage amongst many members of the Nationalist community had not only resulted from open discrimination and geographical disparities, but also from traditions and established practices. As King explained:

> [I]n many significant areas there is discrimination – some of it deliberate, some of it inadvertent, some of it merely maintaining past practices and some of it caused by a shortage of employment and the understandable human determination... to ensure that a member of the family... has the chance of a job... In the circumstances of Northern Ireland, that has the effect of perpetuating employment in one community to the detriment of the other.[124]

The new definition of the problem indicated that the government had understood that the question of inequality in employment required a much broader approach than hitherto. Consequently, the monitoring of the religious composition of the workforce, which had been omitted from the 1976 Act, was now considered 'the key to fair employment practice',[125] and the failure to register with the newly created Fair Employment Commission (which replaced the FEA) was made a criminal offence.

Even so, critics pointed to the lack of consistency when it came to the question of how to rectify the under-representation of either community in individual companies. In fact, whilst the 1989 Act compelled employers to consider affirmative action in order to redress existing imbalances, it explicitly prohibited them from taking measures that were exclusive to one particular

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[123] Lord King, interview with author, 27 November 2001; Peter Viggers, interview with author, 28 November 2001

[124] HC, Vol. 136, c. 636, 1 July 1988

community.[126] This apparent contradiction illustrated London's difficulties in acting upon the logic of communal rights whilst maintaining the principle of individual merit and trying to avoid an adverse reaction by the majority community. Accordingly, King stated that the effect of 'quotas and reverse discrimination [would be] catastrophic in the climate of Northern Ireland',[127] yet he failed to explain how the goals and timetables (which companies were encouraged – and in some cases required – to design) were to be realised if not through measures that were specifically aimed at increasing the representation of either Catholics or Protestants. Hence, whilst the 1989 Act signified a considerable step forward in the evolution of British thinking on the issue of relative deprivation, the inherent contradictions of the legislation made clear that London had been a reluctant convert to the notion of collective rights.

6.5 Conclusion

Regarding the perspective of strategic evolution, the signing of the Anglo-Irish Agreement was the single most influential event in the 1982-88 period. Concluding this chapter therefore provides an opportunity to summarise London's main intentions *vis-à-vis* the Anglo-Irish process, and to relate them to the changes that have been triggered by it.

As a consequence of the constraints and pressures that had arisen from undiminished Direct Rule in the 1976-82 period, the British government recognised that the government of the province from London offered no satisfactory framework in which to contain the conflict. As there continued to be no realistic prospect of realising the traditional objective of devolution and power-sharing either, Westminster concluded that the aim of containing the conflict could only be achieved by seeking an accommodation with Dublin, thus easing the operation of Direct Rule. To negotiate a framework that would expedite cross-border security co-operation, facilitate the minority's

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[125] Viggers; HC, Vol. 636, c. 697, 1 July 1988
[126] See McCormack, pp. 66-7
[127] Ibid., c. 639

support for the institutions of law and order, and make the Irish government a responsible 'stakeholder' in the conflict became London's objective from 1983. As a result, London's strategy included the following functions:

- the constitutional instrument, to negotiate a balanced inter-governmental framework, that is, granting Dublin a 'legitimate interest' in the affairs of Northern Ireland but no 'real powers'.
- the military instrument, to gain efficiency at containing paramilitary activity, particularly through improvements in cross-border security co-operation.
- the political instrument, to sideline the local political parties in favour of an inter-governmental accommodation.
- the economic instrument, to ensure 'value for money' within the existing framework of 'peace through prosperity'.

As it turned out, none of London's aims could be realised: after the AIA's conclusion, improvements in cross-border security co-operation were negligible; the minority was no more inclined to support the province's institutions than before; and instead of reducing the tensions between the two governments, Dublin's public criticism of London appeared to have increased. In addition, Westminster's traditional insensitivity towards the constitutional concerns of the Unionists meant that the accord was strongly rejected by the majority. From a strategic point of view, the AIA had therefore been a failure.

Nevertheless, to compare intentions and results is far from sufficient in explaining the significance of the accord. In fact, apart from providing the institutional framework from which a durable accommodation between London and Dublin could emerge, the treaty produced a series of unexpected outcomes which turned out to be highly significant in the longer term. On the Unionist side, the perception that the majority's constitutional and political position had been worsened unacceptably would – in time – become an incentive to re-engage with the other political parties in the province. On the Republican side, the AIA increased the movement's domestic as well as

international marginalisation; it added to the impression of political and military stalemate, and thus forced the leadership to review the assumptions on which its strategy was based. Moreover, in a separate (yet related) development, the AIA contributed to the shift from an individualistic towards a collective conception of fair employment, thus helping the British government to recognise some of the realities of a deeply divided society, which it had previously found convenient to ignore.

Whilst it is therefore correct to conclude that London had failed to achieve its objective, it is equally important to note that the AIA provided some of the foundations that enabled London to return to its traditional objective of devolved and power-sharing. In that sense, the Anglo-Irish Agreement was a crucial pre-condition for the emergence and success of the peace process, which is the subject of the following chapter.

7 The war is over? Success and failure of British strategy, 1989-98

There can be no doubt that the Belfast Agreement represented the climax of British policy in Northern Ireland. The continuity of much of what was agreed in 1998 was immediately acknowledged, most notably by a Nationalist MP, who described the agreement as 'Sunningdale for slow learners'.[1] Whilst London has therefore achieved its longstanding objective, it nevertheless remains to be seen whether the agreement is capable of providing for the long-term containment that London has aimed at throughout the Troubles.

In this chapter, it is argued that the British government played the role of facilitator and self-declared guardian of the political process very effectively. Contrary to the Irish government, which urged for the inclusion of *Sinn Fein* into the political process at almost any price, the British government understood that the integration of the Republican movement could only result in a viable peace process if the integrity of the political process was preserved. With the Joint Declaration for Peace (JDP), London managed to unite the whole spectrum of Nationalism as well as the UUP behind the British agenda for limited constitutional change based on the principle of consent, thus triggering the cessation of PIRA's military campaign whilst retaining the option for a negotiated cross-community settlement. In this regard, the JDP represented the main foundation for the successful conclusion of multiparty talks in 1998, allowing London to realise its objective of devolution, power-sharing and an institutionalised – albeit fairly limited – Irish dimension. Despite this remarkable achievement, Westminster crucially failed to resolve the issue of illegally held weapons, so that the peace process continues to suffer from a structural asymmetry, which could well threaten the realisation of London's aim, namely the creation of conditions of political and constitutional stability that would enable the British government to scale down its involvement in Northern Ireland.

7.1 Agreeing the Irish dimension? The limits of constitutional change

Regarding the future constitutional status of Northern Ireland, London's attitude in the 1989-98 period was one of explicit neutrality based on the principle of consent. Westminster would not act as 'persuader of unity' who encouraged the Unionists to join a united Ireland. Nor, indeed, was it the British government's intention to rally the Nationalists in support of the Union.[2] However, in addition to Westminster's traditional neutrality *vis-à-vis* the constitutional future of Northern Ireland, the British government now also refused to pursue any form of constitutional change without the explicit support of both Unionists and Nationalists. The cornerstone of London's strategy was to produce an agreed settlement, and there was obviously no point in trying to impose changes to the constitutional position of Northern Ireland that one or both sides would find unacceptable. This implied, in turn, that the British government was prepared to implement any outcome as long as it had achieved sufficient agreement between the local parties. Accordingly, Mayhew, who became Northern Ireland Secretary in 1992, believed it 'impossible to visualise anything on which they together, freely and without impediment, agree that the British government would wish to stymie'.[3] In this regard, London's use of the constitutional instrument can be seen as a function of the political process.

However, whilst emphasising its neutrality, the British government also regarded itself as a guardian of the process, who would facilitate practical options for constitutional change, as well as reject those that were unlikely to secure agreement – put simply, London was 'partisan for progress'.[4] In performing the role of a benign facilitator, Westminster's actions were guided by several considerations. First, there was a well balanced set of established

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[1] Seamus Mallon, quoted in J. Tonge, *Northern Ireland. Conflict and Change*, 2nd edition (Harlow 2000), p. 185

[2] Accordingly, Mayhew rejected a motion at the 1994 Conservative Party conference which called for the British government to assume the role of 'persuader for the Union', stating that 'we are persuaders for the future of Northern Ireland to be decided by the people of Northern Ireland without external impediment'; see P. Wintour, 'Union persuader role is rejected', *The Guardian*, 14 October 1994

[3] HC, Vol. 253, c. 1098, 1 February 1995

[4] Tony Worthington, interview with author, 19 March 2002

demands and principles on which the local parties were not prepared to compromise. On the one hand, the scope for movement in the direction of 'full integration' with the United Kingdom was limited by the Nationalist demand that there could be no 'internal' solution, and the resulting need for an institutionalised Irish dimension which expressed the Nationalist aspirations of the minority. On the other hand, the dynamic for a united Ireland was impeded by the Unionist reluctance to consider any substantial transfer of sovereignty, which also rendered ideas like 'joint sovereignty' or 'joint authority' impractical. Moreover, by acceding to the principle of consent, all the local parties (with the possible exception of *Sinn Fein*) and the two governments accepted that self-determination was to be exercised by the people of Northern Ireland who would – for the foreseeable future – come out against a united Ireland if any such proposition was put to them. Taken together, this set of imperatives narrowed the scope for agreed constitutional change considerably, and it was therefore 'perfectly logical' to London that any search for constitutional change was bound to revolve around the nature, extent and responsibilities of cross-border bodies,[5] the idea of which seemed to satisfy the demand for an Irish dimension whilst complying with the guarantee that the constitutional status of Northern Ireland would only be changed with the consent of a majority.

Second, in promoting agreement on the future constitutional status of Northern Ireland, London needed to consider the dynamics of the political process as a whole, as well as the possibility of trade-offs with other areas of negotiation. Brooke, who preceded Mayhew as Northern Ireland Secretary, established a number of ground rules that would become the founding principles of any political process throughout the 1989-98 period. Most significantly, he determined that any settlement had to include agreement in three so-called Strands (relations within Northern Ireland, within the island of Ireland, and between the two governments), and that 'no agreement on any aspect would be reached unless and until all parties were finally satisfied with the whole'.[6] This structure reflected the desire, amongst members of the British government as well as all the local parties, to achieve a

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[5] Lord Brooke (Peter Brooke), interview with author, 14 March 2002

comprehensive solution (see 7.3), and it offered the advantage of 'provid[ing] everybody with the opportunity to see that there was potentially something for them in it'.[7] In turn, it implied that constitutional issues could not be seen in isolation, and that it was possible, for example, to counter-balance far-reaching proposals in the second strand (which would typically deal with the constitutional status of Northern Ireland in relation to the Republic) with concessions in the others. Equally, the drawn-out nature of the political process would make it opportune to promote the constitutional ideas or concerns of one side at the expense of another if the former was believed to be in immediate need of public reassurance.

To demonstrate the overall effectiveness of Westminster's role as a neutral facilitator of constitutional change, it is useful to provide a brief evaluation of London's performance during each of the main political initiatives in the 1989-98 period. At the so-called Brooke/Mayhew talks in 1991-92, the British government assumed an explicitly non-prescriptive role, arguing that it would be wrong to 'prejudge the detailed form that.. arrangements should take'.[8] It was nevertheless clear that Westminster envisaged an outcome which involved limited constitutional change within the constraints described above. London was therefore greatly encouraged when the Unionist delegations stated their willingness to meet Irish ministers, travelled to Dublin, and – in the case of the UUP – offered the establishment of a so-called Inter-Irish Relations Committee in exchange for the removal of Articles 2 and 3 from the Irish Constitution.[9] Given that the Irish government had repeatedly signalled that Articles 2 and 3 were 'on the table' as part of a comprehensive settlement, the British government was disappointed when its efforts to produce movement on the Nationalist side came to nothing. In fact, Dublin's refusal to state clearly that it was committed to changing Articles 2 and 3 was regarded as a 'total breach of faith' by the British side (see 7.3).[10]

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[6] HC, Vol. 172, cc. 1143-4, 5 July 1990
[7] Lord Brooke, interview with author, 14 March 2002
[8] Brooke; HC, Vol. 172, c. 1141, 5 July 1990
[9] Bew, *Northern Ireland. A Chronology*, pp. 276-8
[10] Lord Mayhew (Patrick Mayhew), interview with author, 7 March 2002; for an exploration of Dublin's constitutional position during the 1992 talks, see D. Bloomfield, *Developing Dialogue in Northern Ireland in Northern Ireland. The Mayhew Talks, 1992* (Houndmills 2001), p. 110

In 1992-93, the need to preserve the integrity of the political process made it necessary for London to reject a series of proposals which attempted to question and overturn the implicit consensus on the limited scope for constitutional change. In an attempt to trigger a permanent PIRA ceasefire that would enable *Sinn Fein* to participate in political talks, the leaders of the SDLP and *Sinn Fein*, Hume and Adams, produced several drafts of a declaration of principles which needed to be announced by the British and Irish Prime Ministers (see 7.3). Hume presented the final draft to the Irish government, which – after further modifications – handed it to the British government. The final document referred to the collective right of the 'Irish people' (that is, all the inhabitants of the island of Ireland) to self-determination; it made the British government a persuader of unity who 'will use all their influence and energy' to overcome Unionist reluctance; and it overturned the idea of consent by stating that consent had to be achieved 'over a period' before the two governments would legislate for Irish unity regardless of opposition from within Northern Ireland.[11] Given that the document fulfilled all its traditional demands, it is easy to understand why such a declaration would have triggered an end to PIRA's military campaign: it negated the principle of consent, the need for agreement, and it asked Westminster to abandon its role as a neutral arbiter. For London, the draft was therefore 'little more than an invitation... to sell out the majority in the North, and the democratic principles we had always defended.[12] Rather than leading to a stable, durable and agreed system of government, London anticipated that the adaptation of the draft would have destroyed the political process, resulted in another sustained period of Unionist political withdrawal, or – even worse – it would have ignited the civil war scenario which London had traditionally referred to as the primary reason for maintaining Northern Ireland as part of the United Kingdom.

The Joint Declaration for Peace (also known as Downing Street Declaration) was announced by Major and the Irish Prime Minister, Albert Reynolds, on 15

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[11] The various drafts as well as the document that was presented to the British government in June 1993 are reproduced in Mallie, *The Fight*, pp. 411-20
[12] Major, p. 447

December 1993 after several months of bilateral negotiations. It resembled the Hume-Adams drafts, but whilst its choice of language was deliberately 'green', its content was fundamentally different from what had originally been proposed by the Nationalist leaders. Indeed, in many ways, it was exactly the opposite: it referred to Irish self-determination, yet restored the constitutional *status quo* by stating that self-determination had to be exercised 'on the basis of consent, freely and concurrently given, North and South'; instead of using its 'influence and energy' to persuade the Unionists of a united Ireland, the British government committed itself to what it had always perceived as its role, namely 'to encourage, facilitate and enable the achievement of... agreement'; and rather than establishing a timeframe for the realisation of a united Ireland, the Irish Prime Minister now declared that 'it would be wrong to attempt to impose a united Ireland, in the absence of the freely given consent of a majority of the people of Northern Ireland'. In addition, the Irish side pledged to change Article 2 and 3 of its Constitution in the event 'of a balanced constitutional accommodation'.[13] In a tactical masterstroke, London had thus turned Hume-Adams into an initiative which furthered rather than hindered the political process, and it had produced a document which united the whole spectrum of constitutional Nationalism as well as the biggest Unionist party behind its agenda for limited constitutional change on the basis of devolved government in Northern Ireland and the principle of consent.

At the time of the JDP, London also persuaded Dublin to work out joint proposals on future constitutional arrangements that would be presented to the local parties as a means of illustrating what a settlement might look like (see 7.3). As Mayhew stated, the idea was 'to try to develop a shared understanding of the sort of overall accommodation that might have the best chance of winning the wide acceptance across the community'.[14] Whilst the intention was therefore in line with Westminster's role as a facilitator of agreement, the actual outcome destroyed some of the momentum that had developed as a result of the JDP. Published in February 1995, 'A New Framework of Agreement' proposed North-South institutions that would be

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[13] 'Prime Minister: Joint Declaration issued by Prime Minister Rt Hon John Major MP and Taoiseach Albert Reynolds TD', Cmnd. 2442 (London 1994)
[14] HC, Vol. 248, c. 1026, 27 October 1994

established through an act of Parliament rather than by a future Northern Ireland assembly; and while they were accountable to the assembly, the bodies' responsibilities would be transferred to a standing Inter-Governmental Conference if the internal arrangements in Northern Ireland broke down.[15] Considering that there were no new concessions by the Irish side (it simply reaffirmed the commitment to change Articles 2 and 3), the document was clearly overbalanced towards the Nationalist position. Its 'default mechanism' was, in fact, an invitation for Nationalists to make the Northern Ireland assembly unworkable, so that the need for Unionist agreement could be sidelined.[16]

Dixon argues that the lack of balance was designed 'to underpin the *Sinn Fein* leadership's position and entrench [PIRA's] ceasefire'.[17] However, given that the ceasefire was not yet thought to be in acute danger, it appears unlikely that London would have sacrificed a major initiative for this purpose. It also contradicts the evolution of Westminster's response to the decommissioning deadlock, which entailed direct concessions to the Republicans only from mid-1995 (see 7.3). In reality, Westminster was genuinely surprised by Unionist opposition to the proposals. Like London's response to Unionist opposition in the wake of the AIA, the British government believed that the political representatives of the majority community had misunderstood the content of the document, and that it only needed to 'simmer for a while' before Unionists would acquiesce in it.[18] Indeed, Michael Ancram – the NIO minister who drew up much of the document – now confirms that there was little awareness that the document might be received in a hostile manner:

> The paragraph about the default mechanism was literally written in ten minutes because nobody saw that as meaning anything... Our idea was that if the Assembly broke down, and if you had a joint tourism initiative in America, that the two governments would keep that going. We never saw that as this great monster. It was seized on

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[15] 'A New Framework of Agreement' is the second of the so-called Frameworks documents, contained in 'Frameworks for the Future', Cmnd. 2964 (London 1995), pp. 15-24

[16] This is presumably the reason why *Sinn Fein* welcomed it; see '"Peace deal first, then weapons"', *The Independent*, 27 February 1995

[17] Dixon, *Northern Ireland*, p. 252

[18] 'British minister', quoted in 'Unionists out on a limb', *The Guardian*, 23 February 1995

> unfortunately by the *Times* newspaper, and they leaked the default mechanism as the sign of a sell-out. I was aboslutely amazed. I knew that document, I was living with it for eighteen months. That nuance had never struck us.[19]

Rather than a conscious attempt to overbalance, a more realistic explanation is therefore that the proposals were a blunder, resulting from Westminster's traditional insensitivity *vis-à-vis* the Unionist fear of being drawn into an all-Ireland context with no ability to control the process.

Whilst the Frameworks document was a significant misjudgement, the British government returned to its role as an effective facilitator of constitutional agreement during the final phase of the multiparty talks process from September 1997, when Marjorie Mowlam had taken over from Mayhew as Northern Ireland Secretary. Throughout the 1989-98 period, London made it clear that it was 'not committed to any single outcome and would support any conclusions, achieved by sufficient consensus, that emerged from the discussions'.[20] In contrast to the 1991-92 talks, however, Westminster continued to advance detailed suggestions on the constitutional future of Northern Ireland with a view to accelerating the process, but also in order to provide reassurance. For example, 'Propositions on Heads of Agreement', which was issued by the British and Irish governments in January 1998, was designed to allay Unionist doubts about the peace process. It stated that a North-South ministerial council would only operate 'within the mandate of, and accountable to, the Northern Ireland assembly', and that '[a]ll decisions will be by agreement between the two sides'.[21] As soon as the Republicans voiced their anger about the document, the two governments determined that it was now necessary to counter-balance the Unionist bias of 'Heads of Agreement'. As George Mitchell, the American chairman of the talks, explained: '[Since UUP leader] David Trimble had hailed the adoption of the "Heads of Agreement"... as a victory for Unionism... the governments were trying to even the score [by coming] up with a document that Gerry Adams

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[19] Michael Ancram, interview with author, 1 May 2002
[20] 'Strand 2 Discussions', *Multi-Party Talks*, January 1998
[21] For a reproduction of the document, see Cox, *A Farewell*, pp. 344-5

could declare as a victory for Nationalism'.[22] Hence, the so-called 'Mitchell draft' once again displayed a Nationalist bias, including a detailed exposition of possible areas for North-South co-operation, and the redesignation of some authority over the North-South bodies to the two governments.[23]

In the final hours of negotiation, the talks participants agreed to a last-minute compromise according to which Unionist gains in the second Strand were traded with Unionist concessions in the first Strand,[24] so that the constitutional provisions of the final agreement turned out to be closer to 'Heads of Agreement'. With the North-South ministerial council strictly accountable to the Assembly, the ending of the AIA, changes to the Irish constitution's territorial claim, and the establishment of a so-called Council of the Isles to neutralise Irish North-South co-operation, the agreement could indeed be seen as a 'victory' for the Unionist position.[25] From London's perspective, though, it was not the outcome as such but the fact that agreement could be achieved which vindicated its performance as a constitutional facilitator. In the course of the 1989-98 period, Westminster not only managed to rally the participating parties behind the set of principles it judged to provide the most likely basis for a negotiated solution, but it also succeeded in steering the parties towards an agreed accommodation that was well within the framework for limited constitutional change it had assumed to be realistic. Most importantly, with the restoration of devolved government on an agreed basis, London had achieved the core objective of British constitutional strategy ever since the fall of Stormont in 1972. From a constitutional perspective, Westminster thus created the circumstances in which it was possible to realise the traditional aim of keeping the province at maximum distance from the British mainland without implying the civil war scenario, which was believed would have been triggered by any open transfer of formal sovereignty.

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[22] G. Mitchell, *Making Peace* (London 1999), p. 134
[23] T. Hennessy, *The Northern Ireland Peace Process: ending the Troubles?* (London 2000), p. 163
[24] Paul Murphy, interview with author, 20 March 2002
[25] 'The Belfast Agreement: agreement reached in multi-party negotiations', Cmnd. 3883 (London 1998), pp. 11-6, 25, 29

7.2 Bargaining for peace? The response to PIRA's stalemate

Throughout the 1989-98 period, ministerial statements gave rise to debates about whether or not London had adopted a new approach *vis-à-vis* the military containment of the conflict. In November 1989, for example, Brooke declared that he could 'not envisage a military defeat' of PIRA.[26] Almost four years later, NIO security minister John Wheeler maintained that PIRA was 'already defeated'.[27] Both statements were received with some amazement at the time, yet from a strategic point of view, none of them indicated any new approach or attitude, nor indeed did they contradict each other. Brooke's assertion summed up the central tenet of the British military tradition in Northern Ireland, which was that – given the constraints of acceptability, constitutionality and normality under which the security forces operated – there could be no 'military solution'.[28] As shown in previous chapters, even supposed hardliners like Thatcher or Mason accepted the impossibility of defeating PIRA by military means alone, and in rejecting most of the measures that could have delivered a 'military defeat', they acted accordingly (see 5.2, 6.2). Wheeler's comment was equally unspectacular. Put simply, he expressed the determination of the British government 'not to let them win', and that to deny PIRA a victory would, in the long term, equal its defeat.[29] Arguably, the two statements simply illustrated the perception of military stalemate which had been prevalent amongst members of the British government ever since the first half of the 1970s. The crucial difference was that there was now a similar perception growing amongst Republicans. The real issue was therefore not whether anything had changed on the British side, but rather how London would respond to the changes that occurred on the Republican side.

To understand the way in which the British government determined its military response to the Republican stalemate, one has to explain the

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[26] D. McKittrick, C. Brown, 'Brooke hints at talks with Sinn Fein', *The Independent,* 4 November 1989
[27] '"IRA defeated" says security minister', *The Independent*, 26 August 1993
[28] See Brooke; HC, Vol. 170, c. 132, 12 March 1990
[29] Sir John Wheeler, interview with author, 18 February 2002

constraints within which London operated. In general terms, the formulation of military strategy in the 1989-98 period was guided by three influences, the first two of which demonstrated that there were limits to the extent to which the military instrument could be utilised as a tool for bargaining. First, there was the so-called level of threat, which had always been the primary determinant of the security forces' response. Brooke made it clear that the military presence was 'made necessary by violence, will be maintained as long as there is violence, but will certainly be reduced when violence comes to an end'.[30] In London's view, there was no point in keeping the 'troops on patrol just for the sake of it',[31] yet as long as insurgent groups continued to challenge the authority of the state as well as threaten the lives of British citizens, it was seen as the ultimate responsibility – and indeed, duty – of the British government to respond to that challenge. Republicans have always found it hard to accept this point, partly because Republican ideology only allowed for the British government to be seen as an imperial oppressor.[32] In addition, Republicans have recently started to argue that whilst the British political leadership was genuinely interested in resolving the conflict, the security forces (the so-called 'securocrats') resisted any form of change because change threatened their status.[33] So far, the Republicans have failed to provide any evidence for this hypothesis, and indeed, it is not taken very seriously by those who would have been the targets of the securocrats' alleged conservatism. Adam Ingram (the NIO's security minister from 1997), for example, thinks that the security forces were a 'great motor for change':

> The senior people in the civil service, and the senior people in the RUC, all came from Northern Ireland. They wanted a future. All of them were products of the Troubles, all of them wanted their children, grandchildren and future generations not to have the same problems... The real heroes in all of this are [therefore] those people who were identified and vilified as securocrats.[34]

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[30] Brooke, quoted in Hennessy, p. 68
[31] Major, quoted in O. Boycott, M. White, 'Major says troops strengths are not negotiable', *The Guardian,* 22 November 1993
[32] See Smith, *Fighting for Ireland?*, pp. 6-9
[33] See, for example, P. Whelan, 'Nationalist unity against Britain's military agenda', *An Phoblacht/Republican News*, 4 December 1997
[34] Adam Ingram, interview with author, 4 March 2002

The second influence related to the mechanics of politics in a liberal democracy. Simply, faced with a continuing (and, at some points, escalating) military campaign, no government could afford to scale down its military response unilaterally. While the British government understood that PIRA needed to show that it had not surrendered (see below), it was also a matter of explaining any reduction in the level of force to Parliament as well as the British public, both of whom London needed to justify its actions to, particularly when attacks took place on the British mainland.[35] It comes as no surprise, therefore, that Westminster repeatedly used its secret backchannel to the Republicans in order to impress upon them that 'events on the ground are crucial'.[36] Again, though, Republicans have had great difficulties in understanding that military pressure (especially PIRA's England campaign) could be counterproductive, and they consequently blamed Major's alleged dependence on Unionist votes in the House of Commons for what was seen as British inflexibility (see 7.3).

Third, the formulation of Westminster's military response was guided by its political objective. London's objective was to restore devolved government on the basis of an agreed settlement, and it had always been implicit that Republicans could be part of such a settlement if PIRA ceased its military campaign. It was recognised, therefore, that a permanent ceasefire would only represent the beginning of a process which could lead to an inclusive settlement. For this to succeed, it was not only important that violence be stopped but also that it was seen to have ended without compromising the core principles on which all the other participants agreed, that is, the need for a balanced accommodation on the basis of the three strands, as well as the principles of consent and non-violence. If, on the contrary, London was seen to have surrendered – or struck a 'secret deal' with the Republicans – the majority community would have lost the confidence to participate in the process, or indeed they would have resorted to violent methods themselves in order to make their opposition felt. On the other hand, increasing the level of force beyond what was seen as justified as a response to the level of

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[35] Sir John Wheeler, interview with author, 18 February 2002
[36] This is what *Sinn Fein*'s own records show; see Sinn Fein, *Setting the Record Straight* (Dublin 1994), p. 30

threat would have lost London the support of the SDLP and the Irish government, both of whom strongly believed that any agreed settlement had to include *Sinn Fein*. As a result, whilst the British government needed to be careful not to go 'over the top', some military pressure had to be maintained if London wanted a possible cessation of violence to be followed by a viable peace process. Moreover, since it was believed that it was the perception of military stalemate which had caused the Republicans to rethink their position, it was crucial that this remained a pretext under which supposed 'politicos' like Adams could persuade their followers that there was no possibility of a military solution (see 7.3).

Considering this framework of contraints and political considerations, London's military response throughout the 1989-98 period needs to be seen as entirely proportionate. In the first phase (the stage before PIRA had announced an indefinite ceasefire), there was little that *could*, and indeed little that London *wanted* to do in terms of scaling down the security effort. Equally, though, it is worth pointing out that the British government resisted calls for an increase in the level of force at a time when the security forces were confident that they could 'finish off the IRA' by military means alone.[37] In the early 1990s, the RUC estimated that only six per cent of PIRA's operations in Northern Ireland actually went ahead: 70 per cent were aborted for fear of detection before getting under way, whilst of the remaining 30 per cent, another 80 per cent were prevented or interdicted by the security forces.[38] In that sense, PIRA's switch back to operations on the British mainland was a sign of weakness, and it was interpreted as such by Westminster.[39] Even so, the British government had convinced itself that the rise in paramilitary activity on the British mainland represented the prelude to a political settlement, and that it would be counterproductive to attempt a military solution. As Major put it: '[A]n offer of peace needed to be accompanied by violence, to show their volunteers that they were not

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[37] 'Security Service could have finished the IRA', *BBC News*, 26 August 1997; reproduced in http://www.bbc.co.uk/politics97/news/08/0826/secret.shtml

[38] Sir John Wheeler, interview with author, 18 February 2002; HC, Vol. 202, c. 21, 20 January 1992

[39] Sir John Wheeler, interview with author, 18 February 2002

surrendering'.[40] Accordingly, the British government rejected demands for the reintroduction of internment as well as a list of proposals by the Chief Constable of the RUC, Hugh Annesley, that called for further limitations on the right to silence and the resurrection of the supergrass system.[41]

Throughout the ceasefire period, intelligence showed that whilst PIRA's cessation of military operations was relatively secure, its military machine was far from being stood down (targeting, training and acquisition continued as usual).[42] In addition, the omission of the word 'permanent' from the announcement made it difficult for the political representatives of the majority community to accept the sincerity of PIRA's intentions, thus creating difficulties in terms of their willingness to participate in inclusive negotiations. London's immediate response to the declaration of the ceasefire, on 31 August 1994, was therefore understandably cautious, and Mayhew emphasised that '[n]othing has been reduced or discontinued that cannot be very quickly put back should the situation be seen to require it once again'.[43] Given that Hume had told Major that 'if there was a cessation for three months, the IRA would not be able to start up violence again',[44] Westminster's aim was to create a 'feelgood factor' amongst Nationalist, thereby making it more difficult for PIRA to return to war. As a result, the British government avoided anything that could be interpreted as part of a 'secret deal', but introduced measures which benefited the minority community as a whole, for example, the opening of border roads, reductions in military patrols, helicopter activity, vehicle checkpoints as well as symbolic changes in weapons and headgear.[45] Only from mid-1995, when the peace process had got stuck over the question of prior decommissioning, the British government started to target political concessions more directly towards PIRA, partly as a means of stabilising the position of those within the Republican movement who continued to be in favour of the ceasefire, but also to demonstrate flexibility on questions which were believed to be of

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[40] Major, p. 433
[41] HC, Vol. 227, c. 469, 24 June 1993; O. Boycott, 'RUC may call supergrass scheme back', *The Guardian*, 9 September 1993
[42] See D. Sharrock, 'RUC chief confident IRA on road to peace', *The Guardian*, 25 May 1995
[43] HC, Vol. 248, c. 1021, 27 October 1994
[44] Major, p. 459

crucial importance to PIRA. These included, amongst others, the lifting of exclusion orders from the British mainland and the restoration of pre-1987 remission rates for paramilitary prisoners. Even so, the actual release of prisoners was judged to be part of an agreed settlement (see below), and needed to be withheld as an incentive for PIRA to further engage with the other parties.

London's response to the breakdown of the ceasefire, in February 1996, illustrated that the British government continued to operate within the framework outlined above. Whilst the increased level of threat made it necessary to restore much of the military activity 'on the ground', many concessions (for example, relaxations in prison arrangements) were retained. Most importantly, London resisted widespread calls for an all-out security offensive, including the introduction of internment, which many commentators regarded as a plausible conclusion from PIRA's failure to commit itself to exclusively peaceful means.[46] Likewise, Westminster's military response to the launch of the second 'permanent' ceasefire, in July 1997, followed the pattern of 1994, except for a renewed sense of urgency and increased flexibility on the question of prisoner transfers, which can be seen as an effort to address one of the issues that London had failed to deal with during the first ceasefire.[47]

Another reason for London's considered approach in formulating its military response to the ceasefires was the Republican movement's conscious switch from anti-state to inter-sectarian violence, which manifested itself most virulently in the annual confrontation over the Orange Order parade in Drumcree. In London's view, there was little doubt that the controversy had been orchestrated by *Sinn Fein*, even if Ingram concedes that the Republicans had managed to turn the issue into a genuine grievance: '*Sinn Fein* were not wholly in control of this, but if it was ever going to change direction... they would have taken control'.[48] For London, the situation in

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[45] D. Sharrock, 'Army reduced RUC support', *The Guardian*, 18 October 1994
[46] See, for example, J. Hibbs, T. Harnden, R. Savill, 'Bomb fury isolates Sinn Fein', *Daily Telegraph*, 17 June 1996
[47] M. Mowlam, *Momentum* (London 2002), p. 157
[48] Adam Ingram, interview with author, 4 March 2002

Drumcree recreated the traditional dilemma of how to to keep law and order in a society in which the rule of law was actively resisted by a significant proportion of the population. Nevertheless, Westminster's response was not necessarily determined by the fact that Unionists could mobilise a greater number of people, as Dixon implies,[49] but rather by considerations of geographical concentration and intensity at a particular point in time. In 1996, the reversal of Annesley's original decision not to let the Orangemen march the Garvaghy Road resulted from intelligence reports which suggested that up to 50,000 Protestants would have converged in Drumcree on 11 July, resulting in the loss of many of the residents' lives and, possibly, triggering a civil war like situation.[50] Under these circumstances, Annesley believed the Catholic spill-over (in terms of riots and general unrest) to be easier to handle, not because it necessarily involved fewer people but because it was likely to be less concentrated. A similar conclusion was reached in the following year,[51] yet the judgement changed in 1998. By then, the majority community had become divided over the issue, and the security forces believed that the Protestant spill-over was easier to contain than united Catholic opposition.[52] In any case, London was unhappy about having to make decisions that would pitch one or the other community against it, and thus undermine its role as an 'honest broker'. In a typical response, Westminster therefore created an independent commission which was (eventually) given the right to determine whether a parade should go ahead.

In addition to understanding the formulation of London's military response to the peace process, it is important to examine the evolution of some traditional concepts of British military strategy. The policy of deploying locally recruited security forces – Ulsterisation – came under intense scrutiny from 1989, following the discovery that senstitive files had been passed on to Loyalist paramilitaries by members of the UDR. The consequent inquiry (conducted by John Stevens) found that there had been intense pressure on individual

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[49] Dixon, *Northern Ireland*, p. 263

[50] Annesley outlined his assessment of the situation on 14 July 1996 in an interview on BBC Radio 4. It is reproduced in C. Ryder, V. Kearney, *Drumcree. The Orange Order's Last Stand* (London 2001), pp. 172-4

[51] For the precise circumstances in 1997, see Mowlam, pp. 90-7

[52] Adam Ingram, interview with author, 4 March 2002

members of the regiment from within local communities, and whilst 'collusion' was neither widespread nor systematic, 59 UDR officers were charged as a result.[53] For Westminster, the problem was not merely that 'collusion' took place (indeed, it occurred on the Irish side too),[54] but that the unbalanced composition of the security forces implied that only one of the two communities was affected, thus undermining the perceived impartiality of the security forces and damaging Westminster's credibility as a neutral arbiter. At a time when Brooke had just started to mediate an agreed settlement, it was therefore – in the words of NIO security minister John Cope – 'extremely important that there should not be [any further incidents of collusion]'.[55] Nevertheless, there was little change regarding the overall balance between local and external security forces. Contrary to FitzGerald's claim that the AIA had halted the expansion of the local security forces (see 6.2), the UDR's full-time element reached an historic peak in 1991 (see Figure 4); and in the same year, the RUC was given permission to recruit another 400 full-time regulars (see Figure 5).[56] Once again, London's only tangible reaction to problems within the locally recruited security forces was to re-emphasise its commitment to the principle of professionalisation. Within this limited framework of reform, the fusion of the UDR with the Royal Irish Rangers in 1992, and the decline of the part-time element within the newly created Royal Irish Regiment (RIR), was an imaginative response, removing an offensive symbol to Nationalists whilst representing continuity in the eyes of the majority. As Peter Bottomley (who was a junior minister under Brooke) put it:

> Evolving the UDR into the [RIR] allowed the semi-professional people in the UDR to feel this continuity, and it also allowed the UDR to become a part of history. I think that the adaptation was clever and wise and timely. The UDR was not abolished, but after a time, it did not exist anymore.[57]

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[53] HC, Vol. 172, c. 1927, 15 May 1990
[54] In addition to several PIRA informers within the Irish Garda, the case of Eamon Collins (who was a member of PIRA whilst working for HM Customs and Excise) shows that, even for Republicans, it was possible to abuse official positions within the British civil service; see E. Collins, M. McGovern, *Killing Rage* (London 1997)
[55] Lord Cope (Sir John Cope), interview with author, 5 March 2002
[56] O. Boycott, 'Emergency call-up for UDR troops', *The Guardian*, 20 July 1991
[57] Peter Bottomley, interview with author, 14 February 2002

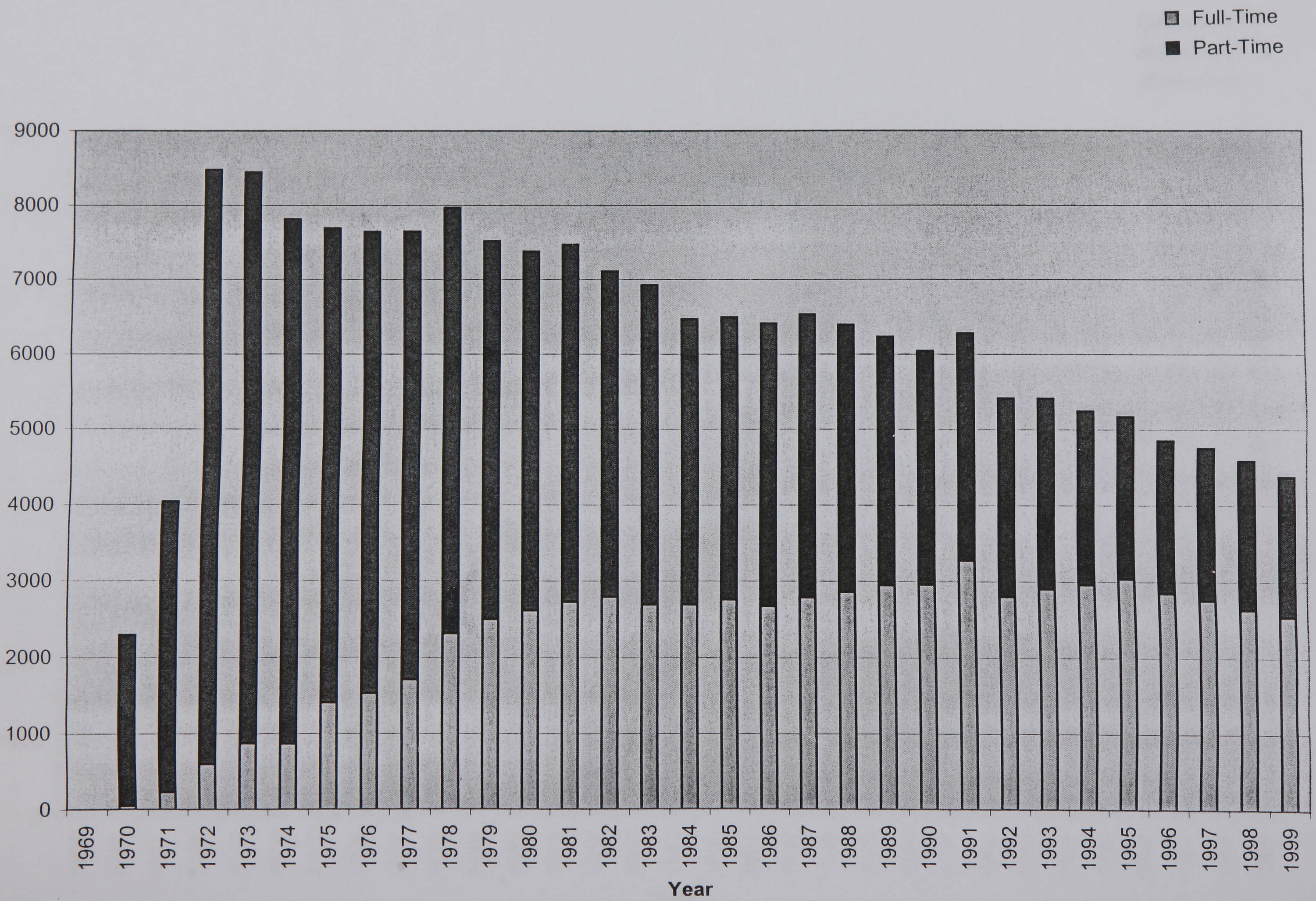

Figure 4: UDR/RIR Manpower 1969-99
Source: see Appendix

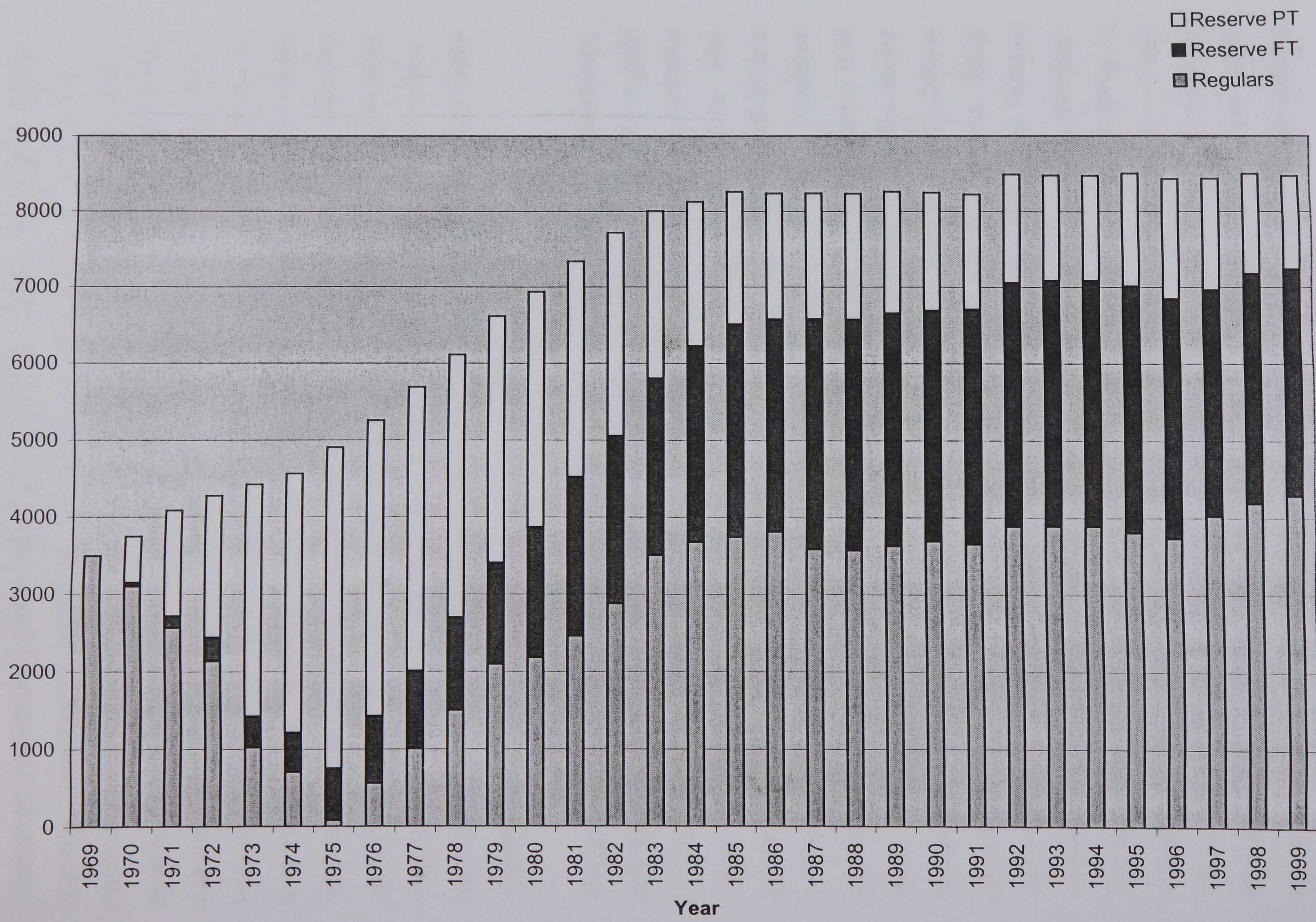

Figure 5: RUC Manpower 1969-99
Source: see Appendix

Still, any fundamental reform of the local security forces' make-up was postponed indefinitely, partly because the British government feared that the majority community might be offended, but also as a consequence of London's traditional indifference *vis-à-vis* the fact that law enforcement in a deeply divided society was bound to be perceived in sectarian terms. For example, like the 1969 Hunt Report, the 1996 White Paper 'Foundations for Policing' emphasised that officers were under a legal obligation to exercise their duties impartially, but – yet again – it failed to introduce any substantial reforms that would have reflected the special needs of policing in a deeply divided society.[58] It was only after the conclusion of the Belfast Agreement that some fundamental reforms – for example, changes to the RUC's name, oath of office, symbols, and a balanced recruitment policy – were eventually implemented.[59]

Regarding the policy of Criminalisation, the early release of paramilitary prisoners – as agreed in the Belfast Agreement – appeared to be the logical conclusion of the peace process: not only was it a practical necessity without which any inclusive settlement would have been impossible. Given that prisoners' licences can be revoked if either they or their organisations engaged in acts of violence, it also seemed to provide a powerful incentive for the paramilitaries not to return to war.[60] Even so, London's belief that early release was somehow 'inevitable', and that all its critics were either intransigent 'nay-sayers' or people who had no insight into the intractabilities of conflict resolution,[61] has stifled any real debate about the issue. Most importantly, it has concealed the fact that the decision to grant early release represented a sharp discontinuity in the evolution of British military strategy. For decades, British ministers had reiterated that there was no such thing as 'political crime' under United Kingdom law, and that – consequently – there could be no 'political prisoners'. This point of principle was maintained throughout most of the 1989-98 period. Michael Mates, who was the NIO's security minister in 1992-93, asserted that he believed 'terrorist organisations

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[58] See 'Foundations for Policing', Cmnd. 3249 (London 1996)
[59] For a summary of the reforms, see G. Jones, D. Sharrock, 'RUC is stripped of royal title', *Daily Telegraph*, 20 January 2000
[60] HC, Vol. 310, cc. 493-5, 20 April 1998
[61] See, for example, Mowlam, pp. 227-8

[to be] criminal conspiracies, representing perhaps the most dangerous threat to the fabric of any democratic society';[62] and Mayhew made it clear that '[t]here will be no amnesty. There are no political prisoners in the United Kingdom'.[63]

Considering the clarity with which the idea of 'political prisoners' was rejected, one would have expected the British government to resist the idea of negotiating about the issue, let alone making it part of a political settlement. After all, if there was no political dimension to crime, how could it be the subject of political bargaining? In reality, though, London had consciously dropped the principle, and decided to turn it into a bargaining chip with which to achieve the removal of PIRA's weaponry. The first explicit recognition of the issue as something that was to be bargained away dates from 1994, when the British government, in its exploratory talks with *Sinn Fein*, started to hold out the early release of prisoners as a *quid pro quo* for the decommissioning of illegal weapons. Quentin Thomas, who was the NIO's Deputy Permanent Secretary, confirms that the two issues were thought to be linked under the heading 'the practical consequences of the ending of violence'.[64] Accordingly, Mates now admits that 'we knew that any deal would have to involve prisoners and decommissioning'.[65] When it came to the Belfast Agreement, however, no 'deal' along these lines was done. As Mowlam's memoirs show, the British government agreed to the early release of prisoners in the hope that the Republicans could be persuaded to agree to the other parties' constitutional proposals, not in return for PIRA's arms. Indeed, she makes it very clear that there was not even an attempt to link the two issues.[66] In the end, London thus gave away what had once been a sacred principle without having addressed the issue of decommissioning at all.

The implications of this decision are difficult to anticipate. On the one hand, one might argue that the idea of Criminalisation had always been flawed (see

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[62] HC, Vol. 209, c. 414, 10 June 1992
[63] HC, Vol. 233, c. 794, 29 November 1993
[64] Sir Quentin Thomas, interview with author, 20 February 2002
[65] Michael Mates, interview with author, 21 March 2002
[66] Mowlam, pp. 220-1, 227

5.2), and that it was therefore time to abandon an outdated policy. On the other hand, the sheer scale of the measure makes it difficult to see how – in Mayhew's own words – it can 'be very quickly put back should the situation be seen to require it once again' (see above). Indeed, it is almost impossible to imagine – both logistically and politically – how Criminalisation could be reintroduced. In assuming that the current strategy of the Republican movement is irreversible, London's decision to abandon the principle therefore represents a giant leap of faith. From a principled perspective, it needs to be seen as a potentially disastrous political fix, undermining the rule of law by conceding that paramilitary prisoners had always been little more than political hostages, thus providing yet another inducement for splinter groups to carry on with their campaigns until the legitimacy of their cause is eventually recognised too. From a practical perspective, the failure to achieve a direct linkage between early release and decommissioning in the Belfast Agreement underlines the structural asymmetry of post-agreement politics. In fact, with prisoner releases now complete, the Republicans have no reason to make their commitment to exclusively peaceful means permanent, or indeed to proceed with the removal of their arsenal, except when there are even more concessions on offer (see 7.3).

7.3 Reaching agreement? The making of an inclusive settlement

In the first years of the 1989-98 period, London was not yet primarily concerned with the inclusion of *Sinn Fein* in a political settlement, but rather with how to revive the talks process between the constitutional parties. Westminster's interest in political talks had arisen from the majority community's continued rejection of the AIA, and the consequent belief that 'any agreement which alienated one part of the community could not be regarded as the final point'.[67] As a result, it now became London's declared objective to work towards a comprehensive and agreed solution, which was most likely to the take the form of devolution and power-sharing, as well as including some element of North-South co-operation. In this regard, the

[67] Sir Quentin Thomas, interview with author, 20 February 2001

British government saw its own role as that of a benign facilitator who would advance realistic options, and implement any package on which the local parties could agree (see 7.1). To focus on the talks process, however, did not exclude the possibility of inclusion. On the contrary, the two concepts were seen as complementary. First, if the end of PIRA's campaign was to be followed by a viable peace process, there was no alternative but to include *Sinn Fein* in a process of multilateral negotiations based on the principle of consent. In London's view, the aim was political stability, and there was consequently no point in pursuing the inclusion of the Republican movement if it destroyed the chances of securing an agreed settlement. As Major explained: '[A] settlement which did not enjoy genuine consent would have stood no chance of working... [W]e would have replaced one problem with a far bigger one'.[68] Equally, London believed that the talks process produced a dynamic which attracted the Republicans into the political process, thus compelling them to take a decision in favour of abandoning their military campaign. According to Thomas: '[I]f there was a vibrant political process going on and *Sinn Fein* were outside it, it was hoped that this would bring pressure to bear on them because they would be missing what would be an important event'.[69]

In the literature on the peace process, it is often maintained that British policy had to undergo a radical shift in order to accommodate the possibility of an inclusive settlement, and that Westminster's reluctance could only be overcome through sustained pressure from Dublin and other actors on the Nationalist side.[70] This view results from an insufficient understanding of British strategy. From an ideological perspective, there had never been any aversion to the idea of an inclusive settlement. In 1972 as well as in 1974-75, Westminster had pursued the idea of an inclusive settlement in direct talks with PIRA and *Sinn Fein* (see 4.3), and even during Thatcher's term in office, there were clear indications that London was prepared to contemplate an inclusive settlement if the Republicans were ready to abandon their military

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[68] Major, pp. 441-2
[69] Sir Quentin Thomas, interview with author, 20 February 2002
[70] This is the argument advanced by E. Mallie and D. McKittrick in their various publications on the peace process; see, for example, Mallie, *The Fight*, pp. 92-112

campaign (see 6.3). It was, in fact, one year before Thatcher's resignation when Brooke indicated that talks with *Sinn Fein* were possible once PIRA had ended the violence.[71] In November 1990, he then held a speech in which he explained the traditional British position of constitutional neutrality to Republicans, stating that '[t]he British government has no selfish or strategic or economic interest in Northern Ireland'.[72] Two years later, Mayhew publicly reaffirmed this message, stressing that the outcome of constitutional talks was not pre-determined, and that *Sinn Fein* could participate in negotiations if the Republicans had sufficiently demonstrated that their commitment to exclusively democratic means was 'real'.[73]

Hence, whilst it is wrong to imply that Westminster needed to change its traditional outlook in order to provide for the inclusion of *Sinn Fein*, it is equally mistaken to overestimate the extent to which the possibility of an inclusive settlement featured in the minds of British ministers. Some authors, for example, maintain that Brooke's speeches and the alleged opening of a secret 'backchannel' to the Republicans in 1990 marked the beginning of a new departure in British policy.[74] Yet, even though it is true that Brooke's as well as Mayhew's statements were calculated attempts to support the ongoing debate within the Republican movement, it would be far-fetched to argue that two speeches over a period of almost two years amounted to an initiative. The 'backchannel', on the other hand, had existed for many years, and even King now admits that there were 'intelligence people manoeuvring around at the margins' in the late 1980s.[75] Likewise, Brooke – who, in earlier interviews, stated that he launched the 'backchannel' in October 1990 – now maintains that there was nothing particularly novel about the discussions between the leadership of the Republican movement and representatives of the Secret Service:

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[71] D. McKittrick, C. Brown, 'Brooke hints at talks with Sinn Fein', *The Independent*, 4 November 1989
[72] Brooke, quoted in Hennessy, p. 69
[73] Mayhew, quoted in ibid., p. 72
[74] See, for example, R. MacGinty, J. Darby, *Guns and Government: the management of the Northern Ireland peace process* (Houndmills 2001), pp. 26-7
[75] Lord King, interview with author, 27 November 2001

Brooke: I was not actually asked for my authority until the February of the following year [1991]. That is logical, because what triggered the request to me was a change in personnel. The person that had previously conducted the exchanges was retiring from the Secret Service. Therefore, they had to have cover, they had to have authority for someone else to be introduced into the process.

Author: There was no conscious decision to open a line of contact to the IRA?

Brooke: No. It was a continuation of the same process.[76]

Throughout the conflict, the purpose of the 'backchannel' had been to provide an 'opportunity to carry on conversation'[77] as well as to pass on messages between the two sides at times of crisis (for example, during the Hunger Strikes in the early 1980s), yet it had never been a vehicle through which any peace process was conducted. If at any point at all, the 'backchannel' assumed real significance in February 1993, when the British government received a message according to which '[t]he conflict is over but we need your advice on how to bring it to a close'.[78] Whilst it is unlikely that the Republican leadership would have phrased a message in this way, London nevertheless believed it to be genuine.[79] The communication was thought to be highly significant and triggered the personal involvement of Major and a selected group of senior Cabinet members. Mayhew was aware that London's conduct during the 1974-75 ceasefire had been 'designed to "trap" Sinn Fein and... had thus done enormous damage' to the government's credibility, which is why he now wanted to make sure that the messages were accurate reflections of the British position (see 4.2).[80] This would also provide a simple explanation as to why London's communications suddenly changed from the casual, suggestive and sometimes speculative style of a

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[76] Lord Brooke, interview with author, 14 March 2002
[77] Brooke, quoted in Mallie, *The Fight*, p. 244
[78] HC, Vol. 233, c. 785, 29 November 1993
[79] A possible explanation is that the priest from Derry-City, who had been involved in conducting the exchanges, interpreted his conversation with the Republican leadership in this way, but failed to make clear that his written summary did not reflect the Republicans' actual statement; confidential interview with Belfast journalist, 9 August 2000.
[80] This is what Mayhew told the Labour MP Clive Soley in 1994; see Soley's diaries, quoted in J. Langdon, *Mo Mowlam* (London 2000), p. 273

Secret Service agent towards the Cabinet's careful exposition of British government policy.[81]

The only tangible change in the years 1989-92 occurred on the Irish side. As shown in the previous chapter, one of Dublin's principal aims in pursuing the AIA was to marginalise *Sinn Fein* (see 6.3). Eamon Delaney, who was a civil servant at the Irish Department of Foreign Affairs, described at length Dublin's 'paranoid caution' about being associated with *Sinn Fein*, stating that 'so distant were Sinn Fein kept, that if people called us looking for their address, we'd say: "It's in the phone book"'.[82] It was only in the years 1991-92 that Dublin fully recognised the Republican desire to end its political and military isolation. Whilst occasional contacts between *Fianna Fail* and *Sinn Fein* had taken place in the late 1980s and afterwards,[83] the formal opening of a 'backchannel' to the Republican leadership in 1992 was seen by Albert Reynolds as 'a total shift in direction, a total shift in policy'.[84] As a result, the same degree of enthusiasm with which the Irish government had once pursued the policy of marginalisation was now put into integrating *Sinn Fein* into the political process. Whilst this 'pan-Nationalist' approach undoubtedly had its merits in terms of generating some confidence amongst the Republicans, Dublin spent little time thinking about how to construct a viable peace process. The ultimate priority was to trigger a cessation of Republican violence, which appeared to equal peace and thus represented the final point of any peace process. In Reynold's words: 'Peace can't wait. The killing must be stopped. Time is not on our side'.[85]

Many authors have overstated the extent to which Anglo-Irish relations had become harmonious after the conclusion of the AIA. For instance, Dixon asserts that both governments worked on the same 'project', and that most of the alleged conflicts between the British and Irish governments were

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[81] London's version of events, starting with the message in February 1993, can be found in HC, Vol. 233, cc. 785-7, 29 November 1993. The Republicans' account was published by *Sinn Fein*; see Sinn Fein, *Setting the Record Straight* (Dublin 1994).
[82] E. Delaney, *An accidental diplomat. My years in the Irish Foreign Service, 1987-1995* (Dublin 2001), pp. 320-2
[83] See Mansergh, 'The background', pp. 16-7
[84] Reynolds, quoted in Mallie, *The Fight*, p. 158
[85] Reynolds, quoted in S. Duignan, *One Spin on the Merry-Go-Round* (Dublin 1995), p. 119

orchestrated in order to generate confidence amongst their respective constituencies.[86] This view, however, is not shared by the British ministers and civil servants who have been interviewed for this study, all of whom emphasise that 'it wasn't a choreography to which we were willing partners at all'.[87] Indeed, Major's Cabinet Secretary, Robin Butler, stresses that 'disagreements were genuine when they occurred'.[88] At the Brooke/Mayhew talks, for example, the Irish government's reluctance to embrace the Unionist advances was regarded with amazement by the British side (see 7.1). Westminster's priority was to establish a robust framework for a negotiated settlement, an important (and desired) side effect of which could have been the inclusion of *Sinn Fein*. Dublin and the SDLP, on the other hand, had decided that an inclusive settlement was 'the only game in town', and that the talks process undermined the chances of achieving this objective. Accordingly, Delaney confirms that it was Dublin which decided to let the talks process fail, recalling that 'half-way through [the 1992 talks] the Irish government realised that... the Provos would have to be "stitched into a settlement"'.[89]

Given that the Irish government and the SDLP could veto the outcome of any talks process, the British government's indirect approach of integrating *Sinn Fein* into the political process had thus become untenable. Equally, adopting the 'pan-Nationalist' approach of halting the talks process until its terms were acceptable from a Republican point of view would have cost the support of everyone except the Nationalists and, thus, destroyed the chances for an agreed settlement. Gary McMichael of the Loyalist Ulster Democratic Party expressed this point trenchently:

> [N]either Reynolds nor Hume recognized that their objective... was isolating Unionism because it was seen as a narrow Nationalist agenda... Sinn Féin was not concerned at all whether Unionism was alienated, because it did not accept that a peace settlement was based on the need for Unionist support. But Reynolds' and Hume's

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[86] Dixon, *Northern Ireland*, pp. 218-9
[87] Lord Mayhew, interview with author, 7 March 2002
[88] Lord Butler (Sir Robin Butler), interview with author, 6 March 2002
[89] Delaney, p. 344

> blind fixation with bringing Sinn Féin on board almost ruined the opportunities that were to be created farther down the line.[90]

As the self-declared guardian of the process, it fell to the British government to formulate a new approach which reflected the need to build the foundations for an agreed settlement whilst accommodating the Nationalist urge to integrate *Sinn Fein*. The JDP represented the successful conclusion of this task, and its significance can hardly be overemphasised (see 7.1). After months of 'hard bargaining' with Dublin, London had effectively managed to turn the Hume-Adams proposals into a declaration which united the whole spectrum of constitutional Nationalism as well as the UUP behind the British agenda for inclusion on the basis of consent and non-violence.[91] While the overall tone of the document was undoubtedly 'green', thus allowing the Nationalist side to claim ownership of the process, the British government had avoided any concessions regarding its own role or the principle of consent. As a means of reassuring the Unionists, London now also pledged to hold a referendum on the outcome of any talks, so that the Ulster Unionists were at liberty to argue that 'the final version... contains no single cog or wheel of mechanism which can be used to the disadvantage of the greater number of people in Northern Ireland'.[92] The Republicans, on the other hand, realised relatively early that there was little in the JDP which represented a tangible advance from their point of view. Adams stated, quite correctly, that 'the British [have] merely conceded the wording of certain irresistible concepts, and then, by qualification, rendered them meaningless'.[93] However, with the Irish government and the SDLP now satisfied that the Republicans had been offered a fair deal, the veto of the constitutional Nationalists had been neutralised, and London's indirect approach of promoting political talks in order to put pressure on the Republicans could eventually be made effective. Ironically, it was Reynolds who became its main executor. In early 1994, Reynolds recommitted his

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[90] G. McMichael, *An Ulster Voice. In Search of Common Ground in Northern Ireland* (Boulder 1999), p. 49

[91] For a description of the events which preceded the announcement of the declaration, see Mallie, *The Fight*, pp. 185-220, 258-72

[92] 'Downing Street Declaration – a dead duck', *Ulster Unionist Information Institute*, March 1994, pp. 4-5

[93] Adams, quoted in Hennessy, p. 84

government to the idea of constitutional talks,[94] and by mid-August, he had sent a message to PIRA, warning that the Irish government would resume their participation in the talks process if PIRA failed to deliver an indefinite cessation of violence. He told his press officer: 'If they dont do this right, they can shag off... I'll walk away. I'll go off down that three-strand talks... road with John Major'.[95]

Once PIRA had declared its ceasefire, on 31 August 1994, the issue of illegally held weapons assumed central importance. According to Nationalist commentators, the demand for the full decommissioning of PIRA's arsenal represented an arbitrary hurdle which had surfaced as a result of Major's dwindling majority in the House of Commons.[96] Whilst London's credibility as an honest broker was certain to suffer from these accusations in any case, circumstantial evidence suggests that Major's dependence on the votes of the nine Ulster Unionist MPs has been overstated. Although some of London's actions could indeed be interpreted as bids for Unionist support (for example, the granting of the Unionists' longstanding demand for a Northern Ireland Select Committee), there were at least as many instances when the government acted in a way that was likely to upset the Unionists (for example, by giving in to *Sinn Fein*'s request for clarification of the JDP).[97] Given that Labour abandoned its opposition policy of 'Irish unity by consent' only once Tony Blair had taken over as leader in 1994,[98] the Unionists' bargaining power was very limited indeed. Compared to the late 1970s, when Thatcher (then in opposition) had promised full integration (see 5.3), one could even argue that the Unionists had an overwhelming incentive to keep Major in power as long as possible precisely by not pressuring the government with ultimatums.

The public debate about decommissioning – including the allegations about a parliamentary deal between Major and the Ulster Unionists – has clouded

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[94] See Major, pp. 462-3
[95] Reynolds, quoted in Duignan, p. 144
[96] Mallie, *The Fight*, p. 228
[97] See M. White, 'London shifts ground on terms of Anglo-Irish deal', *The Guardian*, 17 May 1994
[98] Mowlam, p. 32

rather than illuminated the circumstances under which it became the main obstacle on the way to an agreed settlement. For example, whilst many Nationalist observers claim that it was imposed by the British government *after* the ceasefire had been called,[99] Bew and Gillepsie point out that the Irish Foreign Minister, Dick Spring, referred to 'the handing up of arms' as early as December 1993.[100] Not one of the commentators, however, has been struck by the absence of any sustained debate about the issue prior to the ceasefire. Apart from a cluster of casual references at the time of the JDP, the question of what to do with the arsenal of the largest and best equipped private army in Western Europe appeared not to generate much interest, and no explicit references to the removal of illegal weapons can be found in any official document, including the JDP, the letter of clarification sent to *Sinn Fein* in May 1994,[101] and the British government's secret communication with the Republican leadership in previous years. In that sense, the two governments' handling of the question before the ceasefire allowed no other conclusion than that it would be of minor importance, and while Adams acknowledged the existence of the issue as early as January 1994,[102] he must be forgiven for thinking that his movement could simply ignore it in the same way in which the two governments did.

Hence, why had London ignored the issue for such a long time? Two explanations are conceivable, both of which make clear that the British government needs to share some of the blame for mishandling the issue: first, because it failed to be explicit about what was certain to become a significant concern, and second, because it grossly underestimated the historical, tactical and strategic importance with which the Republicans viewed their weaponry.[103] The first possibility is that the issue was genuinely overlooked. British ministers and civil servants have subsequently argued that the JDP – according to which parties needed to 'establish a commitment

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[99] See D. Sharrock, 'PM "broke word on Ulster talks"', *The Guardian*, 21 June 1995
[100] P. Bew, G. Gillepsie, *The Northern Ireland Peace Process, 1993-1996. A Chronology* (London 1996), p. 35
[101] It is reproduced in O. Boycott, 'Sinn Fein told no further playing for time', *The Guardian*, 20 May 1994
[102] Adams, quoted in Bew, *The Northern Ireland*, p. 41
[103] See K.E. Schulze, M.L.R. Smith, *Dilemmas of Decommissioning* (London 1999), pp. 17-35

to exclusively peaceful methods and [show] that they abide by the democratic process' – was understood by both sides to cover the decommissioning of illegal weaponry.[104] If that was the case, one would have expected the civil service to start working out the modalities under which decommissioning was to take place straight away. In reality, though, it took until after the breakdown of the first ceasefire until the legal foundations for the verifiable destruction of illegal weapons were created,[105] which suggests that London had not expected the issue to assume any real significance, or necessitate any preparation, before it actually did. The second possibility is that London had avoided the question deliberately, assuming that it was better to confront some of the more controversial issues only when the ceasefire was in place and PIRA would find it more difficult to return to war. In his memoirs, Major emphasised that his government's reference to 'the practical consequences of the ending of violence' meant the issue of decommissioning.[106] As we now know, the same phrase also covered the question of early release for paramilitary prisoners (see 7.2), which makes it entirely plausible to conclude that the British government anticipated a problem-free trade-off between the two issues as soon as British representatives were able to meet and discuss the details of a deal with the leadership of *Sinn Fein.*

Once decommissioning had – contrary to British expectations – become the focal point of the peace process, London found itself in a situation that was almost impossible to balance. On the one hand, the British government had no interest in all-out confrontation, knowing that there continued to be an internal debate within the Republican movement, and that to focus on the question of decommissioning would undermine the position of people like Adams who were believed to be genuine 'politicos'. As Thomas explains:

> [W]e would deal with *Sinn Fein* on the basis that they had renounced violence. Of course, everyone knew that it was more complicated than that... We had a situation of converting a movement that was engaged in physical force into a wholly democratic political movement. Anyone who manages political change knows that it is difficult to judge the

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[104] Butler states Dublin and London were 'at one in this respect at the time of the [JDP]'; see Lord Butler, interview with author, 6 March 2002
[105] See HC, Vol. 287, cc. 22-6, 9 December 1996
[106] Major, p. 445

> moment when you take on those within your movement who have the strongest views... And the bad thing about decommissioning was that it kept inviting the *Sinn Fein* leadership to confront those within their movement who they did not want to confront for perfectly normal political reasons.[107]

On the other hand, the British government needed to create the necessary confidence for the political representatives of the majority community to participate in inclusive talks. Westminster had repeatedly misled the public about its secret contacts with *Sinn Fein*, and it was therefore no surprise that London's assurances – according to which there was no 'secret deal' – were regarded with suspicion by the Unionists.[108] Moreover, PIRA's intention to hold on to its weaponry was an understandable disincentive for Unionists to engage with a party that could continue to threaten the use of violence in order to achieve favourable outcomes. As a result, it was difficult for London to compromise its initial demands without further eroding Unionist confidence in the process. As Major explained: 'Unless there is... decommissioning there is unlikely to be confidence among the other political parties that Sinn Fein is committed permanently to peace, and we cannot have all-party negotiations unless all parties are prepared to sit down and talk together'.[109]

In view of these constraints, much of the first ceasefire period needed to be spent on removing the stumbling block of decommissioning whilst attempting not to compromise the integrity of the political process. In the first phase (October 1994 until March 1995), the British government tried to facilitate movement on the Republican side by watering down the original demand for the full decommissioning of PIRA's arsenal. As early as October 1994, Major emphasised that the dismantling of PIRA's 'offensive' capability (for example, Semtex and detonators) was more important than the removal of supposedly 'defensive' weapons, such as guns.[110] In March 1995, London then postulated that *Sinn Fein* could be admitted to full negotiations as soon as PIRA had performed a token gesture on decommissioning. Given that this

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[107] Sir Quentin Thomas, interview with author, 20 February 2002
[108] See 'A joyful time, for some', *The Economist*, 10 September 1994, p. 25
[109] HC, Vol. 267, c. 1201, 29 November 1995
[110] P. Wintour, 'Major makes surrender of Semtex "crucial" test of IRA ceasefire in run-up to talks with Sinn Fein', *The Guardian*, 19 October 1994

was believed to be the outer limit beyond which the Unionists could not be pushed,[111] the second phase (April to September) was marked by attempts to generate Republican confidence through different means. In order to entrench the position of the *Sinn Fein* leadership, London reversed its original policy and enabled the Republican leaders to meet Ancram prior to the start of decommissioning.[112] Throughout the summer, further high-level encounters (involving Ancram, Mayhew and Adams) followed.[113] In addition, and despite the limited extent to which the military instrument could be used as a tool of bargaining (see 7.2), Westminster set out to demonstrate flexibility on issues that were considered to be of importance to the Republican grassroots. For instance, it removed several exclusion orders, announced significant relaxations in prison arrangements, and restored the pre-1987 remission rates for paramilitary inmates as a means of 'bring[ing] the prisoner issue into the equation'.[114] Finally, having accepted that no Republican gesture was likely to be forthcoming, London's attention turned to the search for an alternative way of engendering Unionist confidence. In what could be seen as a third phase (October 1995 to February 1996), the British government first took up the idea of the Unionist MP, Ken Maginnis, to create an international commission on decommissioning. As Mayhew stated at the time: 'Confidence is what it's all about... If a commission could come up with some means of generating that necessary confidence by some other means, then we would want to look at that'.[115] However, after it had become clear that the so-called Mitchell commission (named after its chairman) would not come up with an alternative, but simply recommend the dropping of any decommissioning prior to inclusive negotiations, London sought to balance this proposal by pressing Mitchell for the inclusion of a reference to the idea of an elected body, which had been advanced by the Ulster Unionist leader, David Trimble.[116] When Major singled out this idea from Mitchell's final

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[111] M. Walker, D. Sharrock, 'IRA arms surrender need only be "token"', *The Guardian*, 8 March 1995
[112] D. Sharrock, P. Wintour, 'Arms climbdown clears way for Sinn Fein talks', *The Guardian*, 25 April 1995
[113] D. Sharrock, 'Sinn Fein talks and prison transfers raise prospects of peace breakthrough', *The Guardian*, 28 July 1995
[114] Michael Ancram, interview with author, 1 May 2002
[115] Mayhew, quoted in D. Sharrock, 'Mayhew tempers gun surrender call', *The Guardian*, 18 October 1995
[116] Mitchell, *Making Peace*, p. 34

report, Nationalists immediately accused him of erecting another obstacle on the way to inclusive negotiations. Mitchell himself, though, understood Major's intention very well:

> By proposing an alternate route to negotiations, Major signaled [sic] his willingness to move away from prior decommissioning. Although he was heavily criticized for his reaction to our report, Major's strategy proved to be workable. By focusing on elections, he provided the reassurance that the Unionists needed, and he deflected attention away from his eventual abandonment of prior decommissioning.[117]

However, when Major announced that it was sufficient for the Republicans 'to address' the issue of illegally held weapons (rather than actually carry out an act of decommissioning) for *Sinn Fein* to gain entry to the negotiations,[118] PIRA had already ended its ceasefire.

One factor that has consistently been overstated in the literature on the peace process is the influence of the US government.[119] Like the Irish government and the SDLP, Washington played some role in generating confidence amongst the Republicans. Its impact on the formulation of British government policy, though, was negligible. In late 1993, the White House had completed a review of its non-interventionist policy on Ireland, the most tangible result of which was to grant Adams a visa to visit the United States in early 1994. Given that London had just created the conditions for its indirect approach of integrating *Sinn Fein* to work, the British government perceived the American intervention as an unhelpful interference.[120] By mid-1994, however, the British government had managed to translate the initial disadvantage into an asset. In the summer of 1994, Washington rejected Adams' application for another visa, thereby adding to the pressure on PIRA. In early 1995, President Bill Clinton went on to praise Major's approach whilst lecturing Adams on the need for decommissioning, stating that 'I agree with [Prime Minister Major] that the paramilitaries must get rid of their

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[117] Ibid., p. 40
[118] HC, Vol. 272, c. 900, 28 February 1996
[119] See, for example, O'Leary, *The Politics*, p. 330
[120] The US ambassador in London provides a brief account of the events surrounding the decision to grant the visa; see R. Seitz, *Over Here* (London 1998), pp. 288-92

weapons'.[121] In November 1995, during a visit to Northern Ireland, Clinton played an important role in stabilising PIRA's ceasefire at a time when the British government was searching for an alternative means of generating Unionist confidence. Indeed, Mayhew now confirms that Clinton's public handshake with Adams was stagemanaged by the NIO.[122] J. Dumbrell is therefore mistaken in arguing that Washington's positive attitude during the multiparty negotiations in 1997-98 must be attributed to the personal chemistry between Clinton and Blair.[123] In fact, any substantial differences of approach had been resolved by the previous administration, so that any new government could have relied on the support of the White House from the day it won the elections.

Even if the period between Blair's election victory in May 1997 and the successful conclusion of the talks process in April 1998 can be seen as the climax of British policy in Northern Ireland, it involved little strategic change and will therefore be dealt with only briefly. As Mowlam herself points out, the new government's approach was almost identical to that of the previous administration,[124] except for the fact that London was now at liberty to generate the momentum which the peace process had lacked in previous years. One might therefore conclude that the 1997-98 period illustrated how Major's strategy had eventually paid off, as it not only provided an incentive for PIRA to cease its military campaign, but also the opportunity to follow it up with a viable inclusive talks process. Embracing Major's indirect approach of integrating *Sinn Fein*, the new government's first move was to announce the date for another round of constitutional talks, thus reassuring the Unionists whilst compelling the Republicans to decide in favour of another ceasefire. In what summarised British policy ever since the Brooke/Mayhew talks, Blair stated:

> My message to Sinn Fein is clear. The settlement train is leaving. I want you on that train. But it is leaving anyway, and I will not allow it to

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[121] S. Bates, 'Clinton boosts Major's standing', *The Guardian*, 5 April 1995
[122] Lord Mayhew, interview with author, 7 March 2002
[123] Dumbrell, 'Hope and history', p. 218
[124] Marjorie Mowlam, letter to author, 6 March 2002

> wait for you. You cannot hold the process to ransom any longer. So end the violence. Now.[125]

Considering that Dublin, Washington and the SDLP had by now become firm supporters of the British agenda for limited constitutional change, the Republicans were faced with the choice between isolation and integration yet again. In July, PIRA declared its second ceasefire, and with the controversy about prior decommissioning out of the way, it was possible to move on to inclusive negotiations without delay. Whilst the DUP chose to leave the negotiations at this point, the UUP had convinced itself that there was nothing to lose from participating in a talks process that was designed around the principle of consent.[126] It was crucial, therefore, that London had guarded the integrity of the process, as otherwise the main representatives of the majority community would have dropped out of the process altogether, and no agreed settlement could have emerged.

Apart from the commitment to 'a new beginning' in policing and the strong emphasis on 'equality of esteem', the core provisions of the Belfast Agreement largely followed the example of previous, non-inclusive attempts at producing an agreed settlement. With a devolved Assembly, executive power-sharing and an institutionalised – albeit fairly limited – Irish dimension, the Belfast Agreement contained all the elements which London had regarded as essential ingredients of a constitutional compromise as early as 1973 (see 4.3). In this regard, the inclusion of *Sinn Fein* made no tangible difference, and it is indeed remarkable that Irish Republicans have signed up to a partitionist arrangement which is based on the principle of consent. Whilst, from an institutional perspective, the Belfast Agreement therefore vindicated the British approach, it is nevertheless questionable whether the overall logic of the accord provides the foundation on which the long-term aims of stability and containment can be realised. Repeating the previous government's mistake, the Labour government attempted to sideline the issue of illegally held weapons. According to Mowlam, it was 'essential' to

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[125] 'Speech by the Prime Minister at the Royal Ulster Agricultural Show Belfast', speech by Prime Minister Tony Blair, 16 May 1997; http://www2.nio.gov.uk/speeches.htm
[126] See Hennessy, p. 110

keep Adams in place,[127] and to press for a clear commitment on decommissioning was believed to destabilise the 'politicos' within the Republican leadership. As Alf Dubs, an NIO minister in 1997-99, explained:

> The rather weak wording on decommissioning was probably the best that one could get. My feeling is that *Sinn Fein* said that they would do the best to get decommissioning, but it depended on the difficult situation in their own movement, that is, they were trying to avoid defections... Adams needed a high level of support before he could feel confident about the next move.[128]

In contrast to 1994, however, the Labour government now also removed the principal lever with which the Republicans could be enticed to make their commitment to exclusively peaceful politics permanent. Although decommissioning and prisoner releases are connected in that both are part of the Belfast Agreement,[129] there is no direct linkage between the two; and whereas prisoner releases have now been completed, the removal of illegally held weapons has not. Regardless of what Adams' intentions are, the Belfast Agreement has therefore created a situation in which the Republicans have no reason to make any further moves in the direction of constitutional politics, except when there are additional concessions on offer, or under extreme domestic and international pressure. In that sense, the Belfast Agreement encourages the Republicans to keep their arsenal as long as possible, and continue to employ it alongside the electoral mandate as an additional instrument with which to obtain political advantage, thus undermining the 'moderate' SDLP as an effective representative of Nationalist interests whilst reinforcing the suspicion of the majority community that the peace process is in fact a 'sell out' with nothing to offer from a Unionist perspective. As long as this asymmetry remains the predominant rationale of post-agreement politics in Northern Ireland, the fringes rather than the centre of the political spectrum are bound to benefit, and long-term stability is unlikely to emerge.

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[127] Mowlam, p. 164
[128] Lord Dubs (Alf Dubs), interview with author, 7 March 2002

7.4 Peace through prosperity? Creating the 'peace dividend'

The 1989-98 period saw significant changes in the use of the economic instrument, both in relation to London's view of economic policy as a strategic instrument, and *vis-à-vis* its attitude towards the issue of relative deprivation. Regarding the former, there was a consistent effort to make economic and social policy responsive to the objective of British government strategy. In contrast to Westminster's approach in previous periods, when the instrument of economic policy was related to the overall strategy only in the most general sense, there was now a clear linkage between strategic objective and economic response. For instance, before PIRA declared its first ceasefire, British strategy was geared towards bringing political and military pressure upon the Republican movement, so that PIRA would eventually abandon its military campaign and resort to exclusively peaceful means. Accordingly, the purpose of economic and social policy was to complement this pressure by demonstrating how PIRA's activities destroyed jobs and damaged the prospects for economic growth, announcing precisely what parts of Northern Ireland's social and commercial infrastructure each of PIRA's attacks had destroyed, and how much money needed to be cut from social programmes in order to pay for the damage.[130] As Needham put it, the aim was 'to go on the offensive against *Sinn Fein* and the IRA, and everytime they blew something up, to ask: Mr Adams, why do you do this?'[131]

When PIRA called its first ceasefire, in August 1994, it was obvious that the instrument of economic policy needed to be employed in a different manner. Apart from the symbolic reduction of the British military presence (see 7.2), economic policy played a key role in creating the 'feelgood factor' that was meant to make it impossible for PIRA to return to war. London announced that savings in security would now be spent on social programmes, housing, education, etc. Moreover, in October, Major referred to the province's 'special needs' which made it necessary to continue the high levels of public

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[129] Paul Murphy, interview with author, 20 March 2002
[130] See, for example, Bew, *Northern Ireland. A Chronology*, p. 243
[131] Sir Richard Needham, interview with author, 14 November 2001

expenditure even when political life in Northern Ireland returned to normal.[132] This so-called 'peace dividend' translated into an additional investment subsidy of £73m from the British Exchequer, a £230m three-year aid programme from the European Union as well as significant contributions from Commonwealth countries and the USA, for which London and Dublin had lobbied the respective governments.[133]

In accordance with the framework outlined above, the breakdown of PIRA's ceasefire saw the return to the pre-ceasefire approach. Whilst money from foreign sources continued to be available, London emphasised that additional spending on security needed to be funded from other areas of Northern Ireland expenditure. Ancram put it very bluntly: 'When security requirements are reintroduced as a result of changes in the secuity situation, everyone must share the pain'.[134] Likewise, the declaration of PIRA's second ceasefire was followed by a similar reaction to that in 1994, even if the Labour government was slightly more cautious than Major, stressing that 'the real peace dividend for Northern Ireland... is peace itself'.[135] Yet, whilst Ingram warned that 'extremely high levels of public spending have produced a subsidy culture which cannot last',[136] a whole series of new measures and additional funds were announced during the 1998 referendum campaign, offering – in Chancellor Gordon Brown's own words – 'the chance to build peace with prosperity'.[137] Likewise, Mowlam was a strong believer in the idea of the peace dividend, stating that 'people would need to see some [economic] progress... if they were to have a belief that any peace process would work'.[138] It is likely, therefore, that economic policy continued to be seen as an instrument with which to create political momentum and complement the overall objective, and thus as an integral instrument of British government strategy in Northern Ireland.

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[132] HC, Vol. 248, c. 1101, 27 October 1994
[133] Ibid.
[134] HC, Vol. 291, c. 412, 27 February 1997
[135] Ingram, quoted in G. Gudgin, 'A tougher life ahead for the economy', *Parliamentary Brief*, 5:6 (1998), p. 44
[136] Ibid.
[137] 'Northern Ireland: Towards a Prosperous Future', speech by Chancellor Gordon Brown, 12 May 1998; http://www2.nio. gov.uk/speeches.htm

Furthermore, contrary to the reluctant and 'discreet' approach in previous periods, the issue of relative deprivation now became a priority of London's economic and social policy. In what would have been unusual in past decades, Brooke now declared material inequalities between Catholics and Protestants to be 'the most fundamental structural issue facing any government',[139] and Mayhew stated that London was 'unequivocally committed to eradicating inequality of opportunity and relative disadvantage... wherever they exist in Northern Ireland'.[140] In 1997, the government even included the aim of 'combat[ting] discrimination in the workplace' in the Queen's speech – it was the first time that this issue had been given such a prominent place.[141]

There is little hard evidence as to what had caused London's enthusiasm for an issue which it had found convenient to ignore for most of the Troubles. Three explanations are conceivable. First, it could be seen as a response to the heightened awareness of economic differentials amongst Nationalist leaders and the Irish government, who had become passionate supporters of strong fair employment regulations only when the US-sponsored MacBride campaign had gained overwhelming momentum (see 6.4). Second, one could argue that there was a genuine change in London's view of how material factors related to the reality of conflict and community division. Whilst, in previous periods, absolute poverty was believed to be the sole economic 'cause' of the conflict (and economic parity with the rest of the United Kingdom the solution), British ministers now maintained that community differentials were equally significant as 'provokers of terrorism'.[142] In addition to the Fair Employment Act, which became law in January 1990, the British government therefore launched an initiative – Targeting Social Need – that was designed to alleviate poverty in the worst affected areas, regardless of whether they were Protestant or Catholic. Westminster emphasised that the definition of areas followed objective criteria, and that

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[138] Mowlam, p. 6
[139] HC, Vol. 205, c. 498, 5 March 1992
[140] HC, Vol. 209, cc. 1056-7, 18 June 1992
[141] HC, Vol. 294, c. 43, 14 May 1997
[142] Tony Worthington, interview with author, 19 March 2002

disadvantages were to be tackled 'wherever they are to be found',[143] but it was understood that the minority community would benefit disproportionately simply because more of its members were likely to be affected by poverty. Whilst ministers were reluctant to admit that this had been the purpose of the programme, one of London's submissions to the multiparty talks made it clear that 'it is expected that over time Targeting Social Need should have the effect of reducing differentials between the two communities'.[144] Third, one might contend that London's surprising interest in the question of relative deprivation resulted from the fact that the issue had finally started to work in Westminster's favour, and that it was in London's interest to highlight its contribution. In the first half of the 1990s, several reports by the Fair Employment Commission (FEC) showed that the 'sectarian gap' between the two communities was narrowing, and that Catholic representation in managerial jobs had significantly increased since the mid-1980s.[145] In 1997, the SACHR noted that the number of Catholics in employment had risen by 15.5 per cent in the years 1990-96, whereas the equivalent increase for Protestants was only 0.2 per cent.[146] Whilst the explanations for this trend are manifold (for instance, different demographics, uneven patterns of emigration, increased overall prosperity, etc.), London was keen to claim the development as a result of its own efforts. As Mayhew declared: 'We have a better story to tell than was the case even a few years ago, and in America, in particular, we are telling it with advantage'.[147] In that sense, the British government had finally managed to reconcile its self-interest with the necessity to tackle the question of relative inequality.

7.5 Conclusion

The successful conclusion of the Belfast Agreement represents the greatest achievement of British policy in Northern Ireland. London not only realised its

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[143] Mayhew; HC, Vol. 227, c. 472, 24 June 1993
[144] 'Liaison Sub-Committee on Confidence Building Measures: Economic and social development: further paper by the British government', *Multi-party talks*, 13 January 1998
[145] See, for example, O. Boycott, 'Sectarian job gap closing in Ulster', *The Guardian*, 26 June 1993
[146] T. Harnden, 'Ulster Catholics getting more jobs', *Daily Telegraph*, 28 June 1997

traditional objective of devolution and power-sharing, but it also managed to provide for the inclusion of *Sinn Fein* into the political process, thus triggering an indefinite cessation of PIRA's military campaign.

At the outset of the 1989-98 period, the British government returned to its traditional objective of promoting an agreed cross-community settlement. Recognising the perception of political and military stalemate amongst Republicans, the British government believed that the inclusion of *Sinn Fein* into an agreed settlement could only succeed if the integrity of the political process was preserved. As Mayhew put it: 'Peace – not peace at whatever price, but peace properly attained – and an agreed political settlement are the government's twin objectives in Northern Ireland'.[148] As a result, the strategic instrument was rearranged as follows:

- the constitutional instrument: to facilitate agreement on a constitutional accommodation, involving devolution and a limited Irish dimension.
- the military instrument: to employ security policy as a tool with which to support the political process whilst maintaining the Republican perception of military stalemate.
- the political instrument: to launch negotiations for a balanced political settlement based on the principle of consent, thus preserving the integrity of the political process whilst paving the way for the inclusion of *Sinn Fein*.
- the economic instrument: to reinforce the need for peace and a balanced settlement through economic incentives.

Until 1993, London's strategy was consistently at odds with Dublin's urge to bring about an end to PIRA's military campaign, even if this would have compromised the political process in which *Sinn Fein* wanted to be included. In this regard, the JDP represented a tactical masterstroke, as it not only united the whole spectrum of constitutional Nationalism as well as the UUP behind the British agenda for limited constitutional change based on the

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[147] HC, Vol. 230, c. 486, 22 October 1993
[148] HC, Vol. 216, c. 1177, 24 January 1993

principle of consent, but also provided a tool with which London's indirect approach of integrating *Sinn Fein* into the political process could be made effective. The successful conclusion of multiparty talks in 1997-98 can therefore largely be attributed to the JDP, which created the platform from which a viable and agreed peace process could be constructed. In that sense, the Belfast Agreement vindicated London's role as a facilitator of agreement which it has performed effectively as well as successfully throughout the 1989-98 period.

Despite this remarkable achievement, one might nevertheless contend that the integration of *Sinn Fein* into the political process has extracted a potentially high price. In the course of the 1989-98 period, the British government crucially failed to secure any commitment that would have made the Republicans' reliance on exclusively peaceful means irreversible. Before the 1994 ceasefire, the British government missed the opportunity to address the question of decommissioning, so that the first ceasefire period needed to be devoted to what Thomas called the 'progressive adjustment of expectations'[149] with regard to this particular question. Repeating the mistake, London again failed to extract any definite commitment in 1998. In contrast to 1994, however, the British government now gave away the only incentive which could have enticed the Republicans to make their adherence to peaceful means permanent. With the early release of paramilitary prisoners, and the consequent abandonment of the principle of Criminalisation, there is now no reason for *Sinn Fein* to proceed with the decommissioning of arms, except under international pressure or because of electoral considerations. On the contrary, the maintenance of a military option ensures that the Republicans are given attention far beyond what could be justified on the basis of their electoral mandate. As long as this remains the case, there is a potentially fatal asymmetry in the peace process that benefits the fringes rather than the moderate centre, and that might well endanger the achievement of the twin aims of stability and containment that London has pursued throughout the Troubles in Northern Ireland.

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[149] Sir Quentin Thomas, interview with author, 20 February 2002

8 Conclusion

The aim of this study has been to evaluate the process of strategic change within the British government's position in the years 1969-98. On the basis of the findings that have been outlined in the previous chapters, the author will now be able to draw a series of conclusions, thus making it possible to understand the formulation of British government strategy as well as the factors that have conditioned the use of the strategic instruments. Finally, the research will enable the author to pass a judgement on whether British government strategy has realised its aims and objectives.

In this chapter, it is argued that the British government's aim throughout the 1969-98 period was to achieve the containment of the conflict, so that the antagonism in Northern Ireland would not interfere with the operation of the British political system, and the government could reduce its political, physical and financial commitment to the province. In the years 1969-71, it was believed that this aim could be realised by maintaining the constitutional status quo. The outcomes of this strategy, however, were highly counterproductive. From 1972, the British government's aim translated into the objective of creating conditions of political stability through a system of government to which both sides would give their consent, thus establishing a mutual veto on what was now seen as the 'political solution'. The predominant influence on the British government's strategic thinking, and the most important factor in determining its strategy, was the political imperative of facilitating agreement on how the province should be governed. However, traditional assumptions continued to interfere with the conditioning of London's strategy, so that its effectiveness as a facilitator of political agreement turned out to be limited. There were two attempts to circumvent the logic of the mutual veto: the notion of producing stability by making Direct Rule semi-permanent (1976-79), and the idea of easing the operation of Direct Rule through an inter-governmental framework, which resulted in the AIA of 1985. Even if both attempts were failures in that they could not achieve what London had intended, they nevertheless conditioned the form

of agreement that was reached in 1998. Whilst the Belfast Agreement allowed London to realise its objective, it is not possible to speak of a 'victory'. On the contrary, in allowing some parties to maintain the threat of violence as a means with which to obtain concessions, it suffers from an asymmetry which furthers instability and might well turn out to make the achievement of containment impossible.

The transformation of British strategy

The formulation of British government strategy after 1972 cannot be explained without understanding the failure of London's approach in the previous period. When the British government first intervened in the Northern Ireland conflict, in August 1969, it was guided by two seemingly paradoxical assumptions. On the one hand, London aimed at keeping its involvement to a minimum, thus ensuring that it would not get drawn into an antagonism which appeared both insoluble and incomprehensible to the governmental mindset. On the other hand, the British government believed that the existing system of Unionist majority rule could easily reform itself in order to accommodate Catholic discontent, and that further British intervention was therefore not necessary. As a result, the objective of maintaining and stabilising the Home Rule structures at Stormont appeared feasible.

London's disregard for the sectarian dynamics of politics in the province turned out to be highly counterproductive. The demand for political reform heightened Protestant insecurity, which strengthened Unionist hardliners whilst undermining the Unionist Party's 'moderate' leadership. The resulting inability to deliver the promised changes shattered Catholic hopes for a more equitable society, and thus provided fertile soil in which the National question could re-emerge. Against this background, PIRA was at liberty to exploit Catholic disillusionment by provoking a purely military response, which furthered the perception that the British Army represented the 'long arm' of the Unionist regime. Indeed, with no political alternative on offer, the British government increasingly relied on the military instrument to achieve its

objective. With incidents like internment and Bloody Sunday, the outcomes of London's approach was wholly negative in that they galvanised Nationalist opposition, leading to the withdrawal of the constitutional Nationalists from Stormont and providing the insurgents with an opportunity to escalate their campaign.

Realising that the 1969 strategy had in fact worsened its overall position by contributing to the escalation rather than the containment of the conflict, London decided to reformulate its approach. The British government was compelled to acknowledge that political stability and containment could only be achieved if the government of the province reflected the sectarian dynamics of politics in Northern Ireland, that is, if both sides were guaranteed permanent access to political power. This assumption translated into the objective of creating a devolved system of government that was acceptable to Unionists as well as Nationalists. As a consequence, the political representatives of the two communities were effectively given a veto on the return to devolution, and the British government was left with the role of a neutral arbiter who would attempt to facilitate agreement.

Throughout the following decades, the imperative of facilitating agreement remained the most important factor conditioning London's strategy. Regarding the use of the military instrument, for example, the counterinsurgency effort had to be carried out in a way that made it possible for the political representatives of the Nationalist community to deal with London without losing the support of their constituency (the demand for 'acceptability'). Also, it needed to reflect the assumption that 'normal' law enforcement was conducive to political compromise across sectarian divisions (the demand for 'normality'). It follows that, whilst the constitutional imperative of protecting life and property against any existing or anticipated use of force continued to be paramount (thus imposing a threshold below which the level of force could not fall), the new objective had imposed additional limits beyond the security forces were not allowed to go in responding to the 'level of threat'. This framework meant that the military instrument was of limited use as a means of 'vicious' bargaining, yet more

importantly, it reinforced London's conviction that there could be no 'military solution', and that it was the security forces' task to 'buy time' for a political settlement in achieving an 'acceptable level of violence' (see 3.2). In that sense, it was the British government rather than PIRA which had first embarked on a 'long war'.

The implementation of British strategy

By establishing a mutual veto, London had provided both sides with a tool with which to prevent the British government from achieving its objective, thus making the realisation of London's aim more difficult than originally anticipated. In 1973, Westminster successfully facilitated agreement between the SDLP and Faulkner's Unionists, yet the ensuing Executive was brought down by Unionist opposition less than six months after taking office. At the 1975 Constitutional Convention, the British government adopted a lower profile, but still failed to overcome the Unionists' unwillingness to share power with Nationalists. At the 1980 Conference, neither the Ulster Unionists nor the SDLP were prepared to become part of an accommodation on the basis of the London's original proposals. In 1982, the 'rolling devolution' Assembly turned out as a 'lame duck' (see 5.3) once the SDLP had decided to boycott it. At the Brooke/Mayhew talks in 1991 and 1992, it was again the Nationalist side which prevented the successful emergence of a political settlement. Only with the Belfast Agreement in 1998 could both sides could be persuaded to agree on how the province should be governed.

Whilst there can therefore be no doubt that London's efforts to mediate a political compromise were numerous, its effectiveness as a facilitator was inhibited by some of the traditional assumptions which continued to interfere with its overarching strategic objective of facilitating a political agreement. Constitutionally, the principal difficulty was that the British government's self-declared neutrality with regard to what state the province would eventually belong to furthered the impression of constitutional insecurity, which isolated the majority community and encouraged a 'siege mentality', thus aggravating

the difficulties in brokering a political compromise. In particular, its unwillingness to uphold Northern Ireland's membership of the United Kingdom for any other reason than the threat of a civil war meant that any Unionist move towards a compromise was bound to be seen as 'lack of determination' that weakened the pretext under which the British government was prepared to defend the Britishness of the province. In turn, each policy change was regarded with suspicion, and every action was interpreted as a possible prelude to withdrawal. London never understood this dynamic, and its insensitivity towards the constitutional concerns of the majority community added to the perception that the British government could not be trusted as a guardian of Unionist interests, regardless of how often it repeated the consent principle.

The British government's military approach suffered from two inherent weaknesses, both of which tended to undermine its capability to maintain its own 'long war'. First, in an effort to sustain the military campaign, but also in order to 'normalise' the security effort, London decided to return the thrust of law enforcement to locally recruited security forces, that is, the RUC and the UDR. Aware that the local security forces had lost much credibility amongst the minority community, the British government genuinely committed itself to their professionalisation, particularly from the mid-1970s when Ulsterisation attained the status of a policy. From a sectarian perspective, however, Westminster had simply transferred law enforcement from the Army back to 'Ulster Protestants in uniform'.[1] There was little understanding amongst British ministers that, in a deeply divided society, the acceptance of law enforcement was bound to be perceived in sectarian terms, and that impartiality was determined by the local security forces' communal composition as much as by their objective professionalism. In this regard, London's ignorance of the sectarian dynamics in Northern Ireland made it more difficult for the majority of constitutional Nationalists to embrace the security forces' campaign.

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[1] McGarry, *Explaining*, p. 85

Moreover, the principle of Criminalisation was an ineffective tool with which to establish the legitimacy of London's involvement. On the one hand, the idea of drawing a firm moral line between the tactics of the insurgents and one's own side was a promising concept. It was a coherent response to the loss of credibility in the wake of internment and 'Bloody Sunday', yet it also suited the traditional British government instinct, which saw PIRA's campaign as a challenge to parliamentary democracy. On the other hand, the principle was rendered meaningless by the inconsistent way in which it was implemented. After prisoners had been granted Special Category status in 1972, and since they were convicted under legislation that defined terrorism as 'the use of violence for political ends', the Hunger Strikers of 1980 and 1981 could be forgiven for thinking that they were indeed 'political prisoners'. With the controversy surrounding the 1981 Hunger Strike, and the consequent rise of *Sinn Fein*, the British government paid a significant political price in order to preserve the integrity of Criminalisation. In fact, it chose to abandon the principle in the following decade. Hoping that a lasting settlement could be gained from doing so, Westminster consciously turned the issue into a bargaining chip, and eventually gave it away without having achieved any substantial concession at all. Instead of securing the 'moral high ground', one might therefore contend that the British government's stance on Criminalisation represented an incentive for political and paramilitary groups to challenge whatever principles the British government claimed to be non-negotiable.

Regarding the instrument of economic and social policy, it took considerable time until the British government recognised its strategic value at all. Throughout the Troubles, the British government believed that there was a causal relationship between the lack of prosperity and the inclination to commit violence, which meant that the prospects of a peaceful resolution could be enhanced if general material conditions improved. The principle of 'peace through prosperity' was implemented rather simplistically in the 1970s, when a seemingly unlimited amount of money was made available to attract inward investment, improve housing conditions and expand the public sector. With adverse economic conditions, however, the British government's 'wild

orgy of senseless spending'[2] produced only limited results. Changing attitudes towards public spending across the Irish Sea meant that there was increasing pressure on Northern Ireland ministers to ensure 'value for money', and whilst the canons of monetarism applied to the province only in a fairly restricted sense, economic Thatcherism nevertheless prompted London to think about how the instrument of economic and social policy could be employed in a more targeted way. As a result, the focus on economic parity with the rest of the United Kingdom lessened, and the idea of the peace dividend emerged. In that sense, London had come to understand the significance of economic and social policy as an instrument of its overall strategy only in the last decade of the 1969-98 period.

Equally, the importance of addressing the issue of relative inequality between the two communities was recognised relatively late. Throughout the 1970s, Westminster found it convenient to ignore what was a persistent grievance of the minority, hoping that its efforts to achieve economic parity with the rest of the United Kingdom would eventually pay off and eradicate any tangible differences in material status between the two communities. Like its approach to the communal composition of the security forces, there was little awareness that issues of economic opportunity were perceived in sectarian terms, and that the perception of unfairness could only be removed if the government was seen to pursue an approach that went beyond the creation of legal safeguards against individual discrimination. In the 1980s, Westminster's reluctance was overcome by external pressures, particularly from the United States and the Republic of Ireland. It was, however, only in the 1990s when the British government truly embraced the issue of relative inequality, partly as a result of its more targeted approach towards economic policy, but also because the narrowing economic gap between the two communities demonstrated that the issue had finally started to work in its favour.

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[2] Butler; HC, Vol. 1, c. 335, 18 March 1981

Two attempts to sideline the mutual veto

London's lack of success in facilitating a political compromise between the two communities resulted in two attempts to sideline the political parties, both of which were meant to overcome the mutual veto and achieve the British government's aim of containment without having to obtain local consent. First, in a plausible aberration from its constitutional tradition, London decided not to pursue any form of constitutional change in the years 1976-79. After the failure of two initiatives in the previous years, the British government believed that constitutional stability had to be achieved before any agreed political accommodation could emerge, and undiminished Direct Rule (supported by financial generosity and a hawkish attitude on security) was therefore thought to provide an appropriate framework within which to realise this end. However, in assuming that undiminished Direct Rule was equally acceptable to both communities, and that it could be imposed as a semi-permanent system of government, the British government had committed a significant error of judgement. Neither the Irish government nor the political representatives of the minority in Northern Ireland were prepared to acquiesce in this strategy, and the resulting pressures compelled London to abandon its approach.

The intention to refrain from any more attempts to bring about an agreed form of devolution, combined with the Labour-Unionist parliamentary pact in the House of Commons, severely undermined Westminster's credibility as an honest broker. The period of undiminished Direct Rule resulted in a more intransigent attitude by the SDLP, which had been happy to comply with the watering down of the Irish dimension at the 1975 Constitutional Convention, but now inisisted that the Irish government had to be given a say in how to rule the province in order to set the balance of power straight. With the Unionists strongly opposed to any form of Irish dimension, agreement on what was called an 'internal settlement' had thus become almost impossible. In this regard, the period of undiminished Direct Rule had made London's task as a political facilitator even more difficult: instead of overcoming the mutual veto on a political settlement, it had strengthened it; and rather than

'taking the constitutional question out of Northern Ireland politics', it had demonstrated that the need for an institutionalised Irish dimension was not only a natural instinct but a political necessity. It could therefore be argued that the formal recognition of the Irish dimension in the Anglo-Irish Agreement was but the official reflection of what had become a firm political imperative several years before.

This study has shown that it is possible to establish a causal relationship between the period of undiminished Direct Rule in the latter half of the 1970s and the Anglo-Irish Agreement of 1985, which represents the second attempt to overcome the mutual veto by sidelining the local parties. Whilst it would suit the overall thrust of this work to portray the AIA as just another attempt by both governments to facilitate political agreement by establishing an incentive for the Unionists to agree to devolution and power-sharing (in order to replace the AIA), the evidence suggests that this had never been the intention of the British government. In reality, the AIA was a response to the Nationalist pressures which had arisen from the period of undiminished Direct Rule. Yet rather than deliberately worsening the constitutional status quo for the majority, Westminster simply intended the agreement to be a tool with which to accommodate the Irish government and ease the operation of Direct Rule.

Its insensitivity towards the constitutional concerns of the majority community meant that Westminster had failed to see how the AIA was overbalanced towards the Nationalist position. Indeed, British ministers were genuinely surprised by the strong Unionist rejection, as they believed that the agreement had not only preserved Northern Ireland's status as part of the United Kingdom but in fact strengthened it. In that sense, the AIA had been a failure: instead of easing Direct Rule, it resulted in a period of sustained political stalemate and instability, which brought Westminster into direct confrontation with the Unionist majority whilst being of limited value *vis-à-vis* the goal of re-engaging the minority, or even ending the 'megaphone diplomacy' between London and Dublin.

Even so, the accord produced a series of unexpected outcomes which turned out be highly significant in the following decade. After years of political withdrawal, the perception that the 'centre of gravity' had shifted towards an all-Ireland setting provided an incentive for Unionists to re-engage with the other parties. On the Republican side, the fact that the British government had agreed to an accord that so obviously disadvantaged the majority community, combined with London's seemingly newfound determination to 'take on the Unionists', contributed to the impression that there was now a political and military stalemate on the British side, which – in turn – contributed to the Republicans' own perception of political and military marginalisation. Ironically, and contrary to London's expectations, the treaty had thus provided the political foundation on which the British government's traditional objective of facilitating political agreement between the two communities could be realised in the peace process of the following period.

The success of British strategy

Some authors have argued that the AIA resolved the principal contradiction of British strategy, as it allowed the British government to side with Unionist interests whilst the Irish government would address the Nationalists' concerns.[3] This hypothesis remains open to challenge. Whilst there can be no doubt that the AIA generated enormous confidence amongst Nationalists, little had changed from a British perspective. To be an even-handed mediator between the conflicting national aspirations continued to be seen as a necessity, if not a governmental duty. Paul Murphy, Mowlam's deputy in the years 1997-99, put this point very strongly:

> It is often said that the Irish government looks after the Nationalists, and the British government looks after the Unionists. We couldn't do it like that, because – whatever you think about it – the British government actually governs both communities. That's the difference. As it happens, Nationalists and Unionists in Northern Ireland both live under the British state. There's a responsibility on behalf of British statesmen to look after everybody in that part of the United Kingdom.

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[3] See, for example, H. Cox, 'From Hillsborough to Downing Street – and After' in Catterall, *The Northern Ireland*, p. 196; Dixon, *Northern Ireland*, pp. 218-9

> The Irish government don't govern Northern Ireland – we do. We have a special responsibility to look after everybody's interest, and especially to bring them together and work out a compromise.[4]

Throughout the 1989-98 period, London thus returned to its traditional role as an honest broker and facilitator for agreement. Contrary to previous periods, however, it did so with great skill. Even if the Frameworks document of 1995 was a significant error of judgement (displaying Westminster's innocence with regard to Unionist sensitivities once more), the British government was largely successful in gearing its strategy towards the facilitation of political agreement. Indeed, given the huge strain which the Nationalist demand for the inclusion of *Sinn Fein* imposed on the process, the JDP was possibly the most remarkable political achievement of the entire 1969-98 period. It united the whole spectrum of constitutional Nationalism and the largest Unionist party behind the British agenda for an agreed settlement based on the principle of consent, limited constitutional change and Nationalist-Unionist co-operation in a devolved system of government. Most significantly, in doing so, it compelled PIRA to declare an indefinite cessation of violence without having obtained any privileges, assurances or concessions.

From London's perspective, the inclusion of *Sinn Fein* into the political process had never represented an insurmountable ideological problem. As the author has shown throughout this study, the British government always believed that any group could become part of the 'moderate centre' as long as it rejected violence as a means of political expression. It is therefore mistaken to argue that London's position somehow shifted from 'moderation' towards 'inclusion of paramilitaries', as Cunningham suggests.[5] In fact, Westminster's position has been far more consistent than that of any other actor in the conflict. As early as 1972, representatives of the British government were trying to woo the Republicans into the political process. After the failure of the 1974 Executive, the idea that 'extremists' needed to be turned into 'doves' became even more of a political imperative, as the fate of the first power-sharing experiment seemed to illustrate that any 'coalition'

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[4] Paul Murphy, interview with author, 20 March 2002
[5] Cunningham, *British Government Policy in Northern Ireland, 1969-2000*, p. 154

needed to be 'broadly based'. From the middle of the 1970s, the Republican movement's 'Armalite and ballot box' strategy suggested that there was no genuine interest in either ceasing violence or engaging with constitutional parties, so that London's approach towards *Sinn Fein* appeared to become more hostile, yet even during Thatcher's term in office, the British government kept to its traditional position, stating that the Republicans were excluded not because of the nature of their political aims but because they used violence in order to achieve them, and that once they had abandoned violence, the possibilities were almost limitless. As Major expressed it in 1993: 'Let me make explicit what has always been implicit. Those who decline to renounce violence can never have a place at the conference table in our democracy, but if the IRA end violence for good then... Sinn Fein can enter the political arena as a democratic party'.[6]

The inclusion of *Sinn Fein* was a practical rather than an ideological problem. As the self-declared guardian of the process, London was concerned about how to construct a viable political process, and it was almost alone in recognising that there was little point in including *Sinn Fein* into the political process if doing so triggered the exit of the Unionists. The difference between the Irish and the British governments in the early 1990s was therefore one of procedure. Whilst London would have preferred to launch the political process without *Sinn Fein* in order to create a dynamic that would attract the Republicans into constitutional politics, the Nationalists had decided that the political process needed to be halted until the Republicans found its conditions acceptable. In any case, the fact that the largest Unionist party was eventually prepared to sit down at the same negotiating table as *Sinn Fein* resulted from Westminster's effort to construct a political process that was attractive enough for Nationalists whilst generating sufficient confidence amongst Unionists in order to make a negotiated and inclusive settlement between the representatives of both communities possible.

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[6] Major, quoted in M. White, O. Boycott, 'Major bars Unionist peace vote', *The Guardian*, 16

The failure of British strategy

At first glance, the Belfast Agreement undoubtedly vindicates London's approach. The British government has eventually realised its objective, and by participating in the devolved institutions, it could be argued that even *Sinn Fein* now subscribes to the ideas and principles which have been advocated by the British government ever since the abolition of Stormont in 1972.

Even so, in its eagerness to capitalise on the unique opportunity to integrate the Republican movement into the political process, London potentially compromised the achievement of its aim, that is, to contain the conflict. To this day, Westminster has failed to extract any tangible commitment from the Republican movement that its commitment to exclusively peaceful means is absolute. Anxious not to destabilise the Republican leadership, the issue has been sidelined, hoping that the conclusion of a settlement would allow for a 'deal' that involved the release of prisoners in return for the decommissioning of illegally held weapons. In the final hours of negotiation, however, the principle of Criminalisation was bargained away without having obtained any concession on decommissioning.

By removing any incentive for the Republican movement to make its commitment to peaceful means absolute, the British government has institutionalised an asymmetry from which the peace process continues to suffer. As long as the Republicans are allowed to employ the threat of violence in addition to their electoral mandate, they are bound to be more effective at securing concessions for their constituency than the parties who rely on the ballot box alone. The overall logic of the peace process is therefore the opposite of what the British government has intended it to be: it furthers extremists at the expense of genuine 'moderates', and thus represents an ongoing source of instability that has so far not allowed London to reduce its political, physical and financial commitment to the province.

November 1993

Appendices

ABBREVIATIONS

FT	Full Time
GB Reg	Army regiments based in Great Britain
PT	Part Time
Reg	Regulars
Res	Reserve
RIR	Royal Irish Regiment (Home Service)
RUC	Royal Ulster Constabulary
UDR	Ulster Defence Regiment

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If unavailable, numbers were obtained from the *Conflict Archive on the Internet*: http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/ni/security.htm

FIGURES

Figure 6: Overall Security Presence, 1969-99

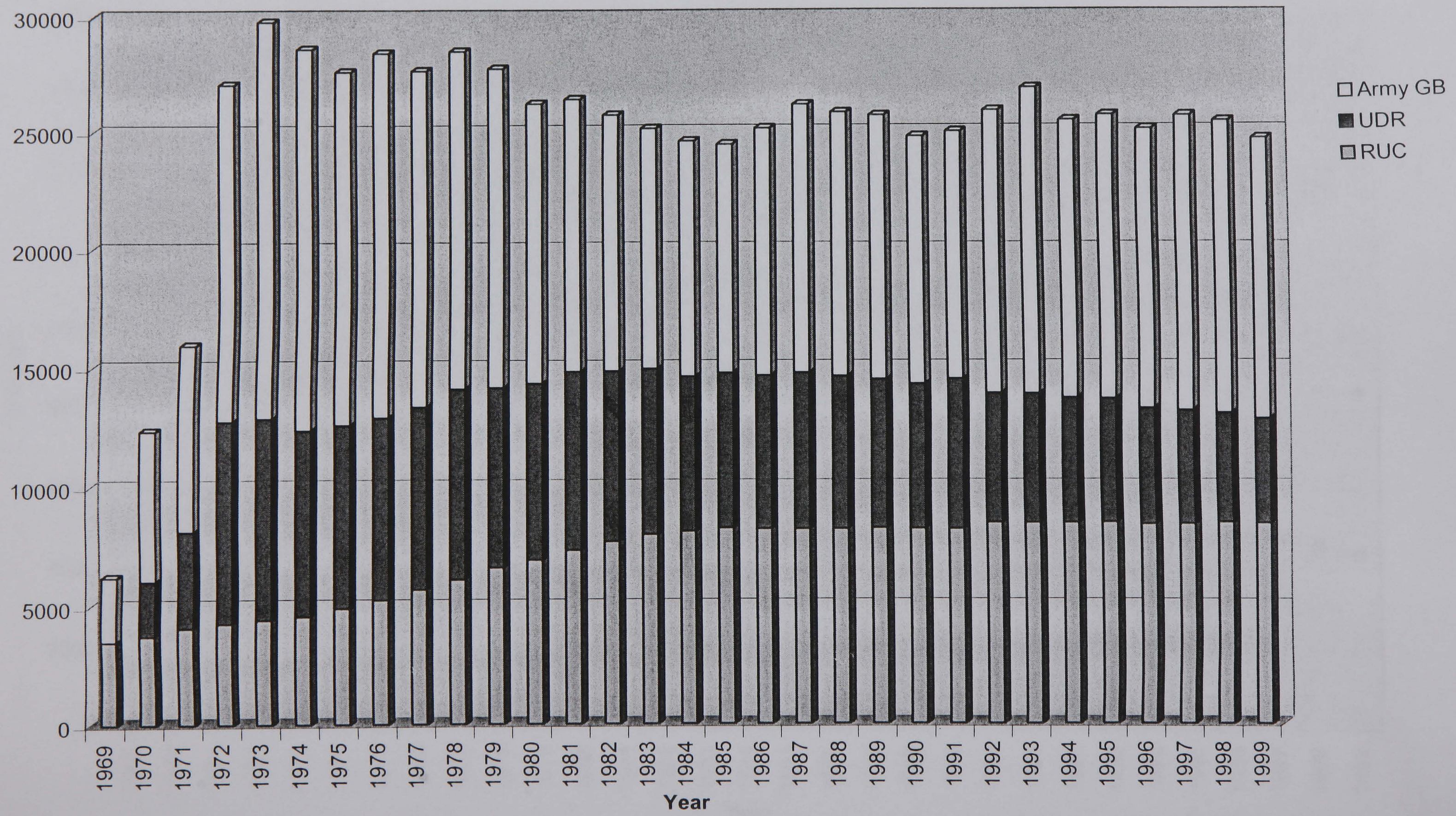
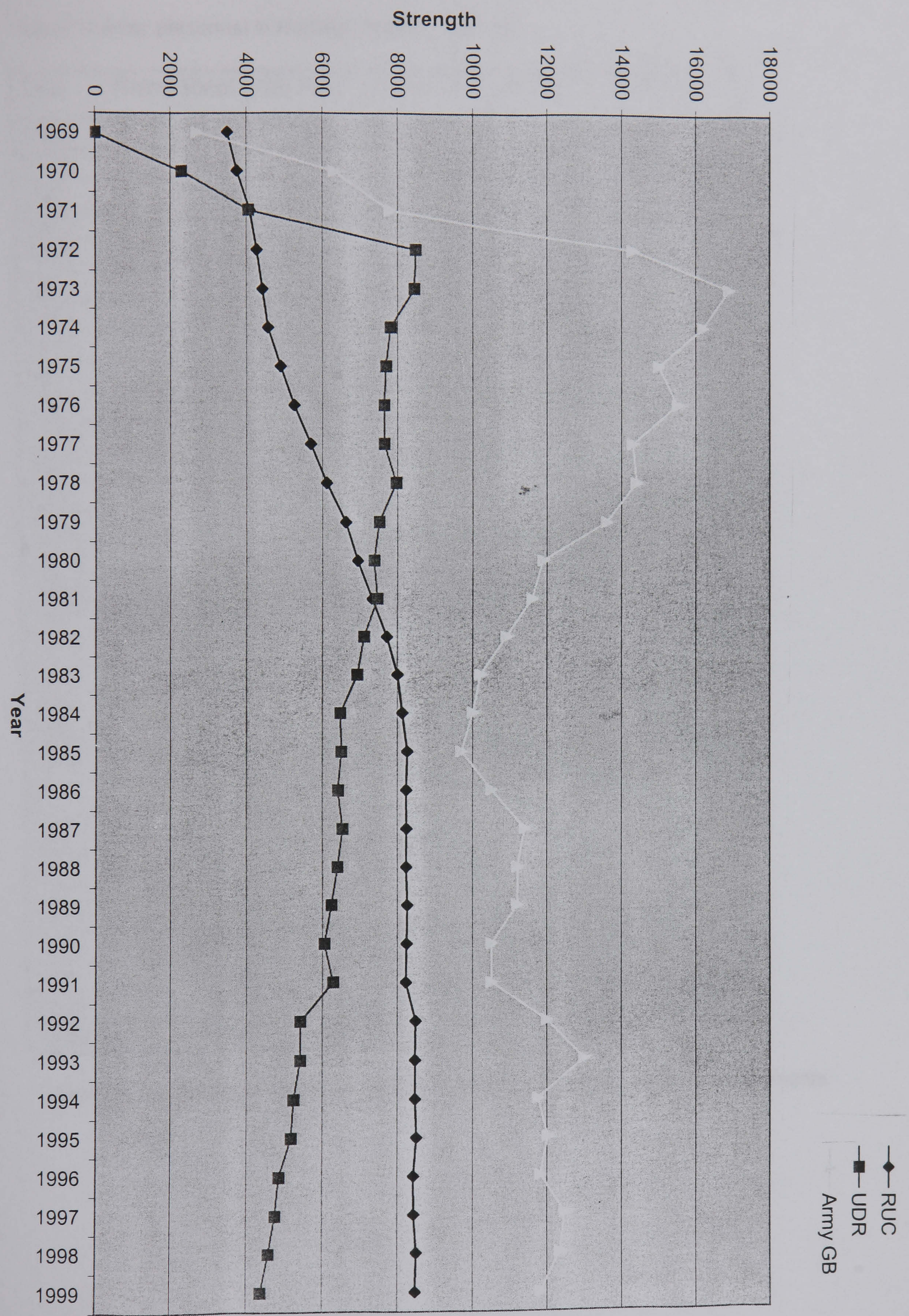


Figure 7: Security Forces: Manpower 1969-99



TABLES

Table 1: Army personnel in Northern Ireland, 1969-99

Year	**Army total**	*GB Reg*	*UDR-RIR*	UDR FT	UDR PT
1969	**2700**	*2700*	----	----	----
1970	**8592**	*6300*	*2292*	49	2243
1971	**11844**	*7800*	*4044*	226	3818
1972	**22776**	*14300*	*8476*	595	7881
1973	**25343**	*16900*	*8443*	866	7577
1974	**24015**	*16200*	*7815*	864	6951
1975	**22692**	*15000*	*7692*	1406	6286
1976	**23145**	*15500*	*7645*	1528	6117
1977	**21951**	*14300*	*7651*	1707	5944
1978	**22370**	*14400*	*7970*	2314	5656
1979	**21118**	*13600*	*7518*	2495	5023
1980	**19276**	*11900*	*7376*	2610	4766
1981	**19070**	*11600*	*7470*	2723	4747
1982	**18011**	*10900*	*7111*	2793	4318
1983	**17125**	*10200*	*6925*	2690	4235
1984	**16468**	*10000*	*6468*	2689	3779
1985	**16194**	*9700*	*6494*	2755	3739
1986	**16908**	*10500*	*6408*	2672	3736
1987	**17931**	*11400*	*6531*	2785	3746
1988	**17593**	*11200*	*6393*	2858	3535
1989	**17430**	*11200*	*6230*	2947	3283
1990	**16543**	*10500**	*6043*	2955	3088
1991	**16776**	*10500**	*6276*	3277	2999
1992	**17417**	*12000*	*5417*	2797	2620
1993	**18412**	*13000*	*5412*	2902	2510
1994	**17000**	*11759*	*5241*	2956	2285
1995	**17189**	*12019*	*5170*	3036	2134
1996	**16670**	*11815*	*4855*	2847	2008
1997	**17234**	*12477*	*4757*	2754	2003
1998	**16934**	*12346*	*4598*	2627	1961
1999	**16200**	*11823*	*4377*	2536	1841

* Numbers are estimates based on publicly available information on troop deployments.

Table 2: Strength of the Royal Ulster Constabulary, 1969-99

Year	**RUC total**	*RUC reg.*	*Reserve FT*	*Reserve PT*
1969	**3500**	*3500*	*0*	*0*
1970	**3750**	*3100*	*50**	*600*
1971	**4083**	*2564*	*150**	*1369*
1972	**4273**	*2139*	*300**	*1834*
1973	**4421**	*1021*	*400**	*3000*
1974	**4563**	*703*	*510*	*3350*
1975	**4902**	*83*	*661*	*4158*
1976	**5253**	*556*	*870*	*3827*
1977	**5692**	*1006*	*1002*	*3684*
1978	**6110**	*1505*	*1188*	*3417*
1979	**6614**	*2100*	*1305*	*3209*
1980	**6935**	*2183*	*1685*	*3067*
1981	**7334**	*2464*	*2060*	*2810*
1982	**7717**	*2878*	*2173*	*2666*
1983	**8003**	*3510*	*2295*	*2198*
1984	**8127**	*3687*	*2533*	*1907*
1985	**8259**	*3751*	*2755*	*1753*
1986	**8234**	*3821*	*2753*	*1660*
1987	**8236**	*3590*	*2987*	*1659*
1988	**8231**	*3577*	*2993*	*1661*
1989	**8259**	*3635*	*3018*	*1606*
1990	**8243**	*3697*	*2990*	*1556*
1991	**8222**	*3663*	*3042*	*1517*
1992	**8483**	*3891*	*3160*	*1432*
1993	**8470**	*3896*	*3185*	*1389*
1994	**8469**	*3897*	*3184*	*1388*
1995	**8499**	*3812*	*3199*	*1488*
1996	**8424**	*3741*	*3101*	*1582*
1997	**8430**	*4028*	*2929*	*1473*
1998	**8495**	*4190*	*2982*	*1323*
1999	**8465**	*4294*	*2936*	*1235*

* Numbers are estimates based on publicly available information on RUC recruitment.

Table 3: British Government Office Holders, 1969-99

Year	Prime Minister	Secretary of State	Minister of State	Parl. Under-Secretary
08/69	Harold Wilson	James Callaghan[1]		
06/70	Edward Heath	Reginald Maudling[1]		
03/72		William Whitelaw	Lord Windlesham (-06/73), Paul Channon (-11/72)	David Howell (-11/72)
11/72			Howell, William van Straubenzee	Peter Mills
06/73				Lord Belstead
12/73		Francis Pym	Howell, Straubenzee	Belstead, Mills
03/74	Wilson	Merlyn Rees	Stanley Orme	Lord Donaldson
06/74			Roland Moyle	Don Concannon
04/76	Callaghan		Concannon, Moyle	James Dunn, Raymond Carter
09/76		Roy Mason	Concannon, Lord Melchett	Dunn, Carter
11/78				Tom Pendry
05/79	Margaret Thatcher	Humphrey Atkins	Michael Alison, Hugh Rossi (-01/81)	Lord Elton, Philip Goodhart (-01/81), Giles Shaw (-01/81)
01/81			Adam Butler	David Mitchell, John Patten
09/81		James Prior	Butler, Lord Gowrie (-06/83)	Mitchell (-06/83), Patten (-06/83), Nicholas Scott
06/83			Lord Mansfield (-04/84)	Chris Patten
04/84				Lord Lyell
09/84		Douglas Hurd	Rhodes Boyson	Patten, Scott, Lyell
09/85		Tom King	Boyson (-09/86)	Lyell, Richard Need-ham, Scott (-09/86)
01/86				Brian Mawhinney
09/86			Scott (-06/87)	Peter Viggers
06/87			John Stanley (-07/88)	
07/88			Ian Stewart	
07/89		Peter Brooke	John Cope	Peter Bottomley (-07/90), Mawhinney, Needham, Lord Skelmesdale
11/90	John Major		Mawhinney	Lord Belstead, Jeremy Hanley, Needham
04/92		Patrick Mayhew	Robert Atkins (-01/94), Michael Mates (-06/93)	Lord Arran (-01/94)
06/93			John Wheeler	Michael Ancram (-01/94)
01/94			Ancram	Baroness Denton, Tim Smith (-10/94)
10/94				Malcolm Moss
05/97	Tony Blair	Marjorie Mowlam	Adam Ingram, Paul Murphy (-07/99)	Tony Worthington (-07/98), Lord Dubs
07/98				John McFall
07/99				George Howarth
10/99		Peter Mandelson	Ingram	Dubs (-12/99), McFall (-12/99), Howarth

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Transcripts

Transcripts of interviews (in alphabetical order)

Michael Ancram, 1 May 2002

Is it fair to say that decommissioning was primarily thought of as a confidence-building measure for the Unionists?

Decommissioning arose when we talked about the concept of a ceasefire. In the early 1990s we accepted that there could never be a military solution, and therefore we had to look for an accommodation and a peace settlement. The view was taken that you could not treat with terrorists. When Sinn Fein/IRA demanded the clarification of the Downing Street Declaration, we answered that we wanted a permanent ceasefire and a wholehearted commitment to peaceful methods, which meant the removal of all arms. We were building at that time on the statement by Dick Spring in the Dail after the Downing Street Declaration, in which he said that the words in the document meant the "handing up of arms". Decommissioning was at that stage not a word that was being used. We felt at that stage that, until the IRA said that they don't have any arms any longer, we couldn't talk to Sinn Fein. It was only later that we realised that we had to have a gradual concept of getting rid of the weapons. The word decommissioning was introduced because the leadership of Sinn Fein/IRA said in my that they could not surrender arms because that was surrender, and that they couldn't do. We therefore coined the phrase decommissioning, because it was a neutral word, and it was there to help the process by which we could get a ceasefire and begin the process of talking to them.

Were you surprised that this became the big issue?

Yes. Considering that we started with the premise that you couldn't have a process with an armed group, we realised that that was creating an enormous hurdle. We then came to Washington 3. It later became a hurdle, but it was actually advanced in order to help them. It was not saying that you had to complete disarming before we would talk to you, but it said that you had to start the process of disarming. From our point of view, it was a concession to Sinn Fein/IRA. Six months later, it was regarded as a big road block. It was a more flexible option than what had previously been the case.

Did you always assume that decommissioning would be the quid pro quo for early release?

The deal at the time was arms for talks. The only thing we did with prisoners was to look after the length of sentences. We tried to have a greater deal of flexibility to allow us to bring the prisoner issue into the equation. But we were not looking at it in terms of release. I would have had very severe reservations about release, particularly since the release took place without anything from the other side.

When you look at the question of arms, it was never a matter of the number of weapons. It was about the psychology, the mindset. I always used to say, if they get rid of half their arms tomorrow, they could buy the same lot the next day. The actual physical handing over of arms was never going to satisfy anything. What you needed to do was to see the decommissioning of arms in the mindset. That is still a problem.

Was it your intention to strengthen the position of Adams of McGuinness?

They were the interlocutors. They were the people who I saw. We regarded them as the two leaders to talk to you. It wasn't a conscious attempt to build them up. We saw them as the people who could deliver.

You still made a number of concessions to them...

We were always trying to see whether there were ways without breaking the principle of decommissioning. I still think that you cannot have a final settlement whilst there are illegally held weapons. If you and I come to an agreement, and I know that you have a gun under your table, I am never going to believe that that agreement was made under no duress. That's what I mean by mindset. No deal can be effective as long as there is an organisation whose political objective is backed up by weapons. That's why decommissioning is still crucial. You can push the hurdle further and further, but you have to effect full decommissioning at some point.

How did you manage relationships with the Republic of Ireland at that time?

We had differences, they were very honest differences. However, after Albert Reynolds went and John Bruton went in, we had a very easy relationship. He was prepared to take risks, he was prepared to talk about Articles 2 and 3 in a way which Albert Reynolds could never do. Also, there was good personal chemistry. The day the summit broke down because the IRA threatened the Irish government with 'blood on the streets of Dublin' was a very difficult moment. I saw John Bruton after an All-Ireland Gaelic Football Final at the back of the stadium, where we agreed that we had to get the process back on again, and that eventually led to the twin track approach.

Were the Framework documents deliberately overbalanced towards the Nationalist position?

I still argue that it wasn't. The language was green, and the document was orange. For the first time, the concept of Northern Ireland was established, and accepted by the Irish government. That was the turning point. The Irish constitution said there was one Ireland, and they never accepted the existence of Northern Ireland. In that document, they did.

That's what they already did in the Anglo-Irish Agreement, even in Sunningdale?

The reason I say that is because Sean O'Huiginn was not happy. He saw the document as the moment when the bridge had been crossed. If you looked at the document, it was all about the creation of an Assembly, with North-South bodies tied to them – it was a document which, in terms of what was established, was unionist. In language it was green because otherwise we would have never got it.

What about the default mechanism?

This is one of the ironies. The default mechanism was put in because the Irish would not accept a situation where the Unionists could veto everything in the long term. It was accepted that if that situation arose, then the Assembly could be suspended. The paragraph about the default mechanism was literally written within 10 minutes because nobody saw that as meaning anything. At that time, the only thing that was coming into question were the areas where there was going to be North-South bodies set up. We were looking at the third category. Our idea was that if the Assembly broke down, and if you had a joint tourism initiative in America, that the two governments would keep that going. We never saw that as this great monster. It was seized on unfortunately by the Times newspaper, and they leaked the default mechanism as the sign of sell-out. I was absolutely amazed. I knew that document, I was living with it for eighteen months. That nuance had never struck us. We wrote it on our side, and we didn't even discuss it. The problem was that when you were working in a very tense, a very febrile atmosphere, people react to things and give them meaning which you never intended to convey. To this day, I am absolutely amazed.

Was the international commission on decommissioning a way of generating Unionist confidence?

Yes. There was a lot of talk of how we had a way of checking what was decommissioned and what wasn't. That was after the talks started. That was part of the process of trying to break out of the discussion of the ground rules into the actual discussions itself. The Unionists said that they were not going to break out of that until they had a firm commitment to decommissioning which would be evaluated objectively.

Was the elected body a tool with which to get rid of prior decommissioning?

Prior decommissioning was still part of the ground rules. I made a number of suggestions to George Mitchell. The reason for elections was that David Trimble had been elected on a no surrender manifesto against John Taylor. It allowed David Trimble to say that he now had a new mandate and come to the talks. John Hume didn't like it, but I felt it was essential. I recognised that the Mitchell Report was likely to create enormous hostility with the Unionists because Mitchell was going further than the government was prepared to. So, we had to find some way of bringing the Unionists back in. The way back in was to say that we only expected them to come back and discuss all this until they had a new mandate to do so.

Were you serious about withdrawing money from social programmes after the breakdown of the ceasefire?

It was pointing out the obvious. The reason why the security bill was so high was overtime. When the ceasefire was there, all the overtime was gone. One of the peace dividends with the ceasefire was not that we withdrew many troops, but there was an enormous saving in terms of overtime. The day the ceasefire ended all this security had to be built up again, so the bill went up again. That year I knew that I was not going to secure as much money for schools because it had to be spent on security. It was a zero-sum game. The failure to show what dividend there is for peace is a very big failure. You have to tell people who have historically lived with violence that there is a better way of life around. The best way to do is to give them a peace dividend.

Sir Robert Andrew, 21 November 2001

How did the Anglo-Irish process evolve?

At one point in 1983 Mrs Thatcher and Farrett FitzGerald decided that "something must be done about Northern Ireland" and instructed their Cabinet Secretaries to propose a plan. I was involved in the process from early 1984. At that point, there were two principal ideas. On the one hand, there was the 'big solution', that is to say, some form of joint sovereignty in exchange for the removal of Articles 2 and 3 from the Irish Constitution. This, clearly, Prime Minister Thatcher would not accept. The process of lowering expectations reached a significant point in October 1984, when Douglas Hurd went to Dublin to meet Irish ministers and told them that joint sovereignty was not on. The Anglo-Irish Agreement, as it finally emerged, was a much more modest affair. It included only a consultative role for the Irish government through the Inter-Governmental Conference and the Secretariat in Belfast.

The British government was primarily interested in improving the security co-operation. This would mean, on the military side, the sharing of intelligence and increased co-operation with the Garda. But it also implied the attempt to bring the Nationalists more on side. One hoped that the Agreement would allow moderate Nationalists to support the law and order effort more than hitherto, and that, for example, the SDLP would encourage Catholics to join the RUC.

Was it another aim of the British government to end what was called 'megaphone diplomacy' between Dublin and London?

Yes. It is true that the machinery that was set up – the Conference and the Secretariat – also served the purpose to sort out incidents as they occurred. This aspect of the Agreement worked better than some of the other expectations that remained unfulfilled.

Was Thatcher's outburst at the Chequers meeting in November 1984 justified as a means of lowering expectations?

It certainly contributed to the lowering of expectations. Her view that joint sovereignty was 'out' was shared by a lot of other people. There was an inherent imbalance in the Anglo-Irish process in that the decision was made not to take the Unionists into confidence, whilst the Nationalists, through their links with Dublin, clearly knew what was going on. It went so far that I was not allowed to tell any Northern Ireland civil servants in Belfast about it. The result was a great outcry and accusations of "betrayal" from the Uionists when the Agreement was finally signed.

Why did Thatcher – despite her Unionist instincts – sign the Agreement nevertheless?

Thatcher felt that something had to be done. Like some of her predecessors (and indeed the current Prime Minister), she felt that she would like to go down in history as making a contribution to the resolution of the Northern Ireland problem. Still, she was not prepared to surrender British sovereignty, and she would have in argued, in fact, that she acted in the Unionist interest by preserving the right of Northern Ireland to remain part of the United Kingdom while the majority so wished.

From what point was it clear that there would be an Agreement?

It was not sure until quite late, definitely at the time of the Dublin meeting on 25 October 1984 when it became clear that there would be no ambitious agreement. Hurd was not ready to be pushed, and as a result, the Irish were quite disillusioned. Until the very end, there were doubts on the Irish side, but there were also doubts on the British side. In particular, Thatcher needed to be convinced throughout the period of negotiation that it was worthwile, and both Robert Armstrong and Jim Prior were instrumental in doing so.

Was there a conflict of interest between different government departments?

The Cabinet Office had been told to achieve this Agreement, and it wanted, therefore, to get the job done. The Foreign Office was really anxious to get an agreement. They wanted to make progress in Anglo-Irish relations, but they also saw an opportunity to improve relations with Washington. The Northern Ireland Office, on the other hand, was more cautious. The reason was that we had to live with whatever was negotiated. The Unionists had not been consulted, and there was going to be a backlash. Of course, memories came up from the Ulster Worker's Strike in 1974, and our main concern was that the province would not become ungovernable after the conclusion of any agreement.

What was the influence of Irish America?

It was quite strong, and the American dimension was one of the reasons why the Foreign Office was anxious to have an agreement. Direct American involvement was not as great as it subsequently became under the Clinton administration, but it was pro-nationalist and we were keen to stop the flow of money from which the IRA benefited. In that sense, one way of showing to the Americans that progress could be made by constitutional means was the Anglo-Irish Agreement.

The difference between the situation then and the situation today was that we were not talking to the IRA. In fact, the whole point was to secure support from moderate Nationalism and somehow to marginalise the IRA. We wanted to show that you can't do business with terrorists and that moderates on all sides should unite against them. By getting Catholics to join the RUC, for example, we hoped to gain moderate support and isolate the IRA.

What, in your opinion, was the reason why the British government moved from 'supporting the moderates' towards inclusive negotiations with the IRA in the 1990s?

I think that here was a mix of motives. First, there was a misconception in some quarters that Northern Ireland was somehow similar to a colonial situation, in which progress was only possible when one talked to the so-called freedom fighters – simply because they would be tomorrow's leaders to whom the country would be handed over. I think that that was a false parallel because Northern Ireland was not a colonial situation. The Nationalist minority was represented in parliament, and change was possible through the ballot box.

However, the main point was that supporting the moderates hadn't worked, so an alternative had to be tried, and this was to be what became known as the pan-Nationalist approach. In that sense, the Anglo-Irish Agreement might have been a contribution, as I was told that it led to a change of heart on the part of Gerry Adams. He might have realised, for the first time, that the British government was prepared to face down the Unionists, and that progress towards a United Ireland was therefore possible through negotiation rather than violence. The fact that the negotiations were conducted without Unionist knowledge might have shown that the Unionists could not always play the Orange card. The ceasefires then, in the 1990s, were an opportunity that no British government could afford to pass up.

Were you surprised by the Unionist backlash?

No. We expected the backlash. The only question was how far it would go, and whether we would have a similar situation to that of 1974 when the province had become almost ungovernable. In 1985, there was a 'day of action' but no strikes on the lines of 1974. But there was a fairly fine line of what we could do without provoking that kind of reaction. So, the Agreement was bound to offend the Unionists, but we did not want to push the Unionists into action that would make the province ungovernable.

So, you think the Northern Ireland Office had a healthy influence?

One could say, and indeed some colleagues did, that the Northern Ireland Office had had a negative influence on the negotiations. We were against some of the proposed ideas, such as shared sovereignty, abolishing the Ulster Defence Regiment, or imposing restrictions on the RUC. Again, the idea was not push the Unionists too far. In that sense, our influence was not so much negative as realistic.

Was the Agreement designed to provide the Unionists with an incentive to agree to power-sharing?

The Irish side attached a lot of importance to power-sharing. But I had, at that point, become sceptical as to whether effective power-sharing was possible at all. In a sense, the Anglo-Irish Agreement – despite its references to power-sharing – was almost an alternative to power-sharing. The designated role for the Irish government was, to some extent, an admission that the SDLP had failed to exercise the role of champion of the minority. I was surprised, personally, that John Hume would go down that road, as it would deprive his party of its raison d'être.

We paid lip service to devolution, but the Agreement was in fact an admission that power-sharing hadn't worked. We needed to bring in the Irish government to look after the interests of the minority.

What were the main sticking points?

There were several. First, the Republic's constitutional claim to the North. Second, the issue of joint sovereignty, the impossibility of which the Irish government had to reconcile with its own expectations. Then, there were several smaller issues, such as the abolition of the UDR, or the issue of mixed courts – both of which the Irish were very interested in. None of it was going to happen, though. The issue of mixed courts in particular was, in my opinion, a red herring. It was mixed up with the sovereignty issue. You can't really have judges from different countries without taking a step towards shared sovereignty.

By and large, was the Agreement a success?

I would say that it was a modest success. It didn't resolve the problem, even though violence tailed down somewhat. There weren't the great improvements in security co-operation that we had hoped for. Nor was there the tangible increase in support from the Nationalists for the institutions of government. It was a modest step forward in itself, and if it turns out that it influenced Mr Adams' attitude, then it was probably quite significant.

Sir Kenneth Bloomfield, 10 August 2000

In August 1969, what were the aims of British policy?

I think they were trying very hard to avoid what subsequently happened, and what is known as direct rule. What they were interested in was indirect rule. They have come to the realisation that for a great many years, the British government hadn't taken enough interest in what was happening in Northern Ireland...
My own judgement is that it would have been better for all of us if they had introduced direct rule when the Army effectively took over the security rule here. What actually happened was that the Northern Ireland government remained in power for a further period, but their power and prestige eroded and the Army came into a situation which was very bad. Still, at that stage, they were desperate not to think about direct rule.
One thing that was of particular interest to me, as a senior civil servant at the time, was that they seemed to have real fears about how the civil service in Northern Ireland would react. I think they had the experience in Rhodesia in mind. They wondered where the loyalties of civil service would lie? If they had actually been closer to the scene, they wouldn't have had any fears. The members of the civil service never had any doubt where their duty lay. Their duty lay to what the British consitution calls the 'Crown in parliament'. That was the supreme authority, and everybody accepted that.

Hence, Westminster was not only reluctant to intervene, but there was also a lack of knowledge about Northern Ireland?

Yes, there was a lack of knowledge. It began to be aleviated by the posting of United Kingdom representatives in the run-up to direct rule. These were heavy-weight people, and from that time on, they had much better sources of what was happening, about the state of opinion. From then on, they had a listening post around here.
I talked fairly frankly to someone like Howard Smith. I would have said: 'Look, I think Brian Faulkner has pushed his party as far as it could go in the direction of reform. Now, you must form your judgment as to whether this amount of reform can stabilise this situation. That's a matter for your masters in London to decide. But i don't see anybody around to deliver more change than this man could deliver'.

How did this arrangement work in practice?

It is important to say that they didn't come with any executive authority: they didn't have the right to give any orders. As long as Stormont was there, it was sovereign within the powers that were delegated to it. So, what they could do was to talk to the Prime Minister and say: 'look, my masters in London are getting pretty agitated about this'. They could have an influence and exert pressures, and they could go around and talk with people – not only from within the bureaucracy, but from both sides of the community. Very early, for example, they opened a line to the then leaders of Nationalism.
Part of their job, almost like an ambassador, was to make clear what the government in London wanted to see. We listened with great respect because, at the end of the day, Westminster had the power of the purse... And even more importantly, you had to accept that the police could not contain the public order situation without the support of the Army which was under the control of the Ministry of Defence.

How did the Joint Security Committee work?

They discussed the situation. But let's be clear: there was no way in which the Prime Minister of Northern Ireland could order the GOC to do something which the Ministry of Defence would disapprove of. That was inconceivable. The Northern Ireland ministers within the JSC had the opportnity to express views, but often they were pressing for things one knew would never happen. The GOC would then politely say: 'very interesting', but nothing happened.

Did the 1970 change in government in any way alter the situation?

It led to an initial euphoria within the Unionist Party. Conservatives and Unionists had been that close in the past that there was a feeling: these chaps understand us. What then became pretty clear was that the pressure wasn't off to move in the direction of reform. There was a phrase that started to circulate: 'PAG': a permanent, active and guaranteed role for minority and majority alike in the

government of Northern Ireland. It became obvious that the British government – even under Conservative control – was thinking in terms of a much more radical change in government than the Unionist government was able to deliver.
It took some time for this to become clear. There was the fiasco of the Falls Road curfew which led to a feeling that maybe this government [the Conservatives] is going to be tougher than the previous lot, but nothing subsequently happened again, very understandably.

How did the policy of the British government in that period affect the Unionist Party?

It practically destroyed it. I always thought that the party was like a Russian doll which you unscrew. At the heart of the system, you had the Cabinet ministers who knew that things weren't all that easy, who realised the reality of the political situation. Then, you had a parliamentary party, some of whom understood. And then, you had the party organisation in the country who were, to a great extent, still living in the world of a Protestant state for a Protestant people.
These were intolerable pressures. Chichester-Clark eventually resigned because he was continually pressed to do things that he was (a) incapable of delivering and (b) of which he was sceptical anyway. He said: 'On the one hand, I've got Lord Carrington [then Secretary of State at the MoD] pressing me to do this. On the other hand, I have my backbenchers saying: get thousands more soldiers, get stuck into them'. The British government would react by sending penny-packet reinforcements which weren't sufficient to satisfy anybody.

At that time, what exactly did you think PAG meant?

It was very indefinite. It was never made clear to us. I may say that some of us in the civil service had been thinking about how you might provide a better role for the minority that could also be acceptable to the ruling party. We worked very hard on creating this concept of powerful committee structures. It was pretty radical at that time. Chichester-Clark couldn't get them through, but they were still around when Faulkner came in. In some sense, that was the Unionist Party's best offer. That was as far as they could be pushed.
When PAG came up, the question at Stormont was: what do they mean? Do they mean Nationalists in government? Faulkner put his toe in the water by inviting a man called G. B. Newe [a Catholic] to be member of the cabinet. That was a move.
In Faulkner's time, there was an interesting discussion paper about the possibility of coalition government? The position was that a coalition might be possible if people accepted the underlying principles which was to accept that Northern Ireland was part of the United Kingdom, not necessarily that it should be. It did not mean that you had to be a unionist. However, Faulkner was very antipathetic to the idea of a compulsory coalition. He thought this was a fragmentation bomb: at some stage, it would blow to pieces.

Maudling never clearly defined what PAG meant?

Never. It was a kind of Damocles' sword hanging over the head of Northern Ireland politicians.

Was there a shift towards an Irish dimension in the second half of 1971?

I think what happened was that the British government made explicit what has always been implicit. How could you logically argue that Northern Ireland shall remain part of the United Kingdom as long as the majority wanted if you are not prepared to say there shold be a change if the majority doesn't want to be part of the United Kingdom anymore. Ever since the Government of Ireland Act, that has been implicit. The British government never wanted the partition of Ireland. The 1920 Act, for example, embodied machinery that would facilitate Irish unification. All along, that has been the view of successive British administrations. There has been no kind of British sentimental attachment to the idea of partition.
I welcomed the greater explicitness. The great prize in all this was to make a greater number of people agree to the principle of consent. Getting to that point was advanced by that explicitness.

What was thought about the meetings between Heath and Lynch?

Initially, Faulkner had some misgivings about it, but he was beginning to recognise that there was an Irish dimension. It was certainly not true that the IRA campaign was launched from the South. On the other hand, any kind of security approach would have to involve action both North and South because of training camps and arms dumps. So, if you had a hostile Irish government uninterested in stabilising the place, you were really missing the trick.

How would you describe the relations between the Dublin and London governments?

Pretty friendly. I think it came down to personalities. At that time, you had Heath, a pretty stiff kind of figure. However, on the Irish side, you had Lynch, the most genial man imaginable. It was not difficult not to get on well with Lynch. There was an ease in the relation which was quite helpful.

When internment was introduced in Northern Ireland, why was there no attempt to ask Dublin to do the same in the South?

At that time, it was politically impossible for a Fianna Fail government to introduce internment. It was a question of political reality. You can't expect politicians to deliver the impossible.

Do you think that Heath's demand for a transfer of security powers in March 1972 was genuine?

Even before that occasion in March 1972, we had considered very carefully what Northern Ireland ought to do. I had written position papers for the Prime Minister beginning with the proposition that we cannot resist the authority of the British government.
The transfer of security powers Faulkner was bound to refuse: if they were reasonably well informed, they ought to have known that. In some ways, it would have suited them to have a Northern Ireland government as a buffer zone, but realistically, they must have accepted that it was very unlikely that Faulkner would go along with it. The transfer of the reponsibility for security would have been impossible for Faulkner to accept: remember that Chichester-Clark had been crucified on the issue of the B Special Constabulary. Therefore, Faulkner just came to the conclusion that for the Northern Ireland government to remain in office without law and order powers would be intolerable. Local people would still look to him as Prime Minister, but a Prime Minister without the powers that really distinguish a government from a local authority. He had quite clearly decided this before he went, but he wasn't expecting it.

Do you think the fear of a so-called Protestant backlash played a role in the calculations of the British government?

I think it did. I think that it held off the introdution as long as it did. There were various fears of what might happen. I doubt that they expected widespread violence, rather civil disobedience, in particular in the public services.

Did you or Faulkner feel betrayed at the behaviour of the British government, taking into account the assurances given before?

Uncharacteristically, he was pretty naive about that. I think I was surprised by the brutality of the whole thing. But I wasn't surprised about direct rule itself because the whole situation was continuing to deteriorate at a rapid rate. I felt schizophrenic about it: I felt sympathy for Faulkner, but i found that some kind of new opening was needed. It needed what was referred to as 'a discontinuity'.

Peter Bottomley, 14 February 2002

In early 1990, Peter Brooke said that there was 'sufficient consensus' to open inter-party talks. What made him arrive at that conclusion?

There are two secular trends in the North of Ireland. One is that violent Republican parties tend to give up the violence. If you look at Dublin today, you have Fianna Fail, Fine Gael, the Progressive Democrats (as an offshoot of Fianna Fail), and the Workers' Party, all of which were IRA at some stage. Now, significant parts of the Provisional IRA also give up violence.

The other significant trend is that when leaders of the Unionists start doing things which most people would consider rather sensible, they tend to get knifed in the front by their own supporters. You saw Terence O'Neill, James Chichester-Clark, Brian Faulkner and David Trimble being attacked openly by their own people.

The peace process, however, is different from the political process. The peace process involves ordinary people saying that they don't want their sons to die. The political process is trying to catch up with that. You can make a rough comparison with South Africa, where the leaders of the Afrikaner party knew that change was necessary, ordinary white people knew that it was necessary – but in between you had the middle level, the caucus, which stopped it.

What Peter Brooke meant when he was speaking in early 1990, was that the political process was beginning to catch up with what is generally called the peace process. It wasn't the first time, and if you take the Anglo-Irish Agreement, that essentially was saying to Sinn Fein: the government of the Republic of Ireland is not pursuing your approach. The consequence of the Anglo-Irish Agreement was that the Unionists stopped co-operating with Westminster ministers. So, Peter Brooke had to make the assessment whether the Unionists could begin to do something, and he also had to make an assessment about the SDLP and Sinn Fein, that is, whether they were prepared to move.

There were several reasons why he arrived at a positive conclusion with regard to Sinn Fein. First, they began to recognise the Irish state, the Irish government. They were taking their place in the Dail. Second, in personal terms, Gerry Adams' children were getting to the age of 16. Third, the channel of communication with the IRA may have implicated that.

The so-called back-channel, of course, was only opened in October...

I wouldn't be so sure. We had no need to know the details about these things. Any sensible authority would try to make sure that there is a way of communicating, because you need to check things with people. You don't say: can we sit around a table and negotiate – that's a separate issue, and that has been credibly denied. In South Africa, for example, I knew how to meet people. The British High Commissioner wouldn't introduce me to them, but other people would. So, when people say the back-channel opened at a particular time, I think it is rubbish. It may have had a new name, a new form, a new recognition, but I don't think it was new.

Brooke also said that the IRA couldn't defeated. Was that a mistake?

Of course, it wasn't a mistake. To say that the IRA were being unsuccessful was true. And to say that they couldn't be eliminated, that was probably true as well.

Why did he say it?

Out of confidence. You don't say that sort of thing out of weakness.

What impact made the Supreme Court ruling about the Irish territorial claim being a constitutional imperative?

We weren't terribly bothered. I don't even think the Unionists minded terribly. The McGimpsey ruling was an event, but I don't think it made a significant difference to anything.

It didn't harden the Unionists' stance?

The Unionists are like an orchestra. What you hear is sometimes because some people make more noise than other. Sometimes, it's a matter of who is in the light. I don't think you can judge Unionist opinion from the noise they make. We had to put up with many worse things. But I wouldn't say that a particular event or judgement made a particular difference.

What did you think about the Stevens inquiry at the time?

The RUC is a mixture of people. People are capable of behaving wrongly. The Stevens inquiry was a useful illumination of what was going on in that respect. Whether it's covered everything, I can't judge.

I think it's also a question of moods. If i had been a minister in Northern Ireland two years before I had arrived, the crowds would have rocked my car, they would have thrown things, they would have insulted me. Two years later, that had evaporated. I could go into both Loyalist areas and Sinn Fein areas with very little protection. I could do things which were not possible two years before. There was no rational explanation. There was simply a different mood. Maybe it was because the British government was fair, Direct Rule was boring, people wanted more powers for the councils – I don't know.

Do you think the calls for abolishing the UDR were justified, or understandable?

Evolving the UDR into the Royal Irish Regiment allowed the semi-professional people in the UDR to feel this continuity, and it also allowed the UDR to become a part of history. I think that the adaptation was clever and wise and timely. The UDR was not abolished, but after a time, it did not exist anymore.

There was a political motive in doing it?

Political considerations were a part of what made sense. I was also saying that the RUC should be known as the Northern Ireland Police. To have dual titles made sense. Out of all the police services in the United Kingdom, only one had the word Royal in its title, and it was in the one place where it was tribal and controversial. And it struck me that the best thing was not to abolish the RUC but to have the Northern Ireland Police Service / RUC. It was sensible in my view to maintain the continuity of the purpose and the service of the UDR and the RUC – not abolishing it, but ceasing it to exist – was sensible.

As a minister at the time, how did you feel about the impact of the Anglo-Irish Agreement?

It was the signal of co-operation between governments. It was the biggest challenge to the IRA, and the biggest threat to the Unionists. When I first heard about it, in 1984, I thought it was a challenge to the Unionists.

As a minister, I used to meet or talk to my opposite numbers every other day maybe. We had some joint research, it was natural. I went down to Dublin, they came to see me.

Are you happy with how things have developed since?

The level of killing in Northern Ireland has come down dramatically. The acceptability of killing has come down dramatically. The political options for Sinn Fein are growing. The Unionists, however, are still tied to their two speeches. The short says 'no', the long one is 'no surrender'.

Lord Brooke, 14 March 2002

When you became Northern Ireland Secretary, what did you know about what was going on within the IRA?

I received briefing from both the RUC and the Army. It was reasonably consistent advice that there was a kind of debate going on within the IRA and within Sinn Fein as to whether it was sensible going on with what they were doing. I heard tape recordings which made it clear that this was going down some way into the organisation. This was not simply at the top. We now know that that debate had probably started as early as 1986.

I don't know what triggered that change in attitude. It's slightly puzzling that it should have happened in 1986, because they were extremely short of arms between 1980 and 1985. Yet that problem had been entirely solved in 1986 because of supplies from Libya.

What was the purpose of your statement that the IRA could not be defeated?

My actual statement was that it was difficult to envisage a military defeat. There wasn't a purpose. It was an ad hoc response to a question from the Press Association. It was not a planned thing at all.

You said that the IRA back-channel was re-opened in October 1990...

It may be that I had conducted a conversation with somebody else in which somebody else said that it was done in October that year. But I had doubts as to whether that was accurate. I verified what the situation was and it is true that the IRA say that they had approaches during October, which led them to believe that the backchannel might be reactivated. But I was not actually asked for my authority until the February of the following year. That is logical, because what triggered the request to me was a change in personnel. The person that had previously conducted the exchanges was retiring from the Secret Service. Therefore, they had to have cover, they had to have authority for someone else to be introduced into the process.

There was no deliberate decision to open contact to the IRA?

No, it was a continuation of the same process.

During your time in office, was the idea of having an inclusive settlement on your mind?

I gave the answer in my interview after a hundred days in office. I was obviously implying that one could envisage Sinn Fein's involvement in the process, but only if weapons were laid down, only if there was a ceasefire. It's perfectly true that I recognised that the fact that the other parties were talking might itself put pressure on Sinn Fein, that Sinn Fein might feel that they are about to miss the bus if they would not respond.

The talks process and the peace process were complementary...

Yes, I don't think anybody was actually using phrases like the peace process. My rationale when I gave the answer was that the lives of people in the security forces were being lost while they were holding the ring for the politicians to produce a political solution. In my view, they could not be militarily defeated. My view was shared by many people in the security forces. But the security forces still had a role which was to hold the ring. It seemed to me quite wrong that the lives should continue to be lost if the politicians were sitting on their hands.

What was the purpose of your speech in Bangor?

When I got to Northern Ireland in July 1989, I recognised that I had an opportunity which had been less available to Tom King. He was a persona non grata to the Unionists because he was Secretary of State when the Anglo-Irish Agreement was signed, even though he had started to explore – through Brian Mawhinney – the possibility of talks among the constitutional parties. I represented something new. I was someone who had not been part of the Anglo-Irish Agreement. I was anxious, therefore, to explore the possibility of political talks. I made a speech at Methodist College in Northern Ireland in December 1989, saying that I would probably make a new speech in the new year. And my speech was in Bangor in January 1990.

You said that there was now sufficient convergence between the parties. What made you believe that the Unionists were now ready to talk?

Right through the period of talks about talks, which went from August 1989 to March 1991, I was consistently involved in bilateral conversations with the Unionists together (Molyneaux and Paisley), the SDLP, the Alliance Party and the Irish government. I was testing with all the parties whether we could make progress, and it was in January 1990, when I had been there for around six months, that it was worth taking matters further.

You established the 3-stranded process as a ground rule...

It was a process in the intellectual construction of which John Hume had played a role. That remained constant throughout the process, and ever since.

What was the idea behind it?

Partly because it was a good statement of the problem, but also because once the Anglo-Irish Agreement had been signed, the Irish government had been given an interest, and therefore anything that we did had to satisfy everybody. Each of the parties had to see something in it. The structure was not constructed to achieve that objective, but the structure had the advantage that it provided everybody with the opportunity to see that there was potentially something for them in it.

The Unionists had never been to Dublin since Craig went just after 1922, so it was a major possibility for the Irish government that the Unionists would in fact be prepared to come, as indeed Molyneaux did in the latter part of 1992.

The Unionists had to accept the Irish dimension...

It obviously was based on the premise that we wouldn't get a solution without getting a comprehensive solution. Also, the objective of the Unionists was to remove the Anglo-Irish Agreement and the relevant clauses of the Irish Constitution, they recognised that they were not going to get it unless it was part of a comprehensive solution.

Was it always clear that relations between Northern Ireland and the Republic meant North-South bodies?

I don't know how far we got into that, but that was obviously the perfectly logical way in which you were going to go.

Quentin Thomas blames the Irish government for preventing your talks initiative. Would you agree with that?

They certainly prevented us holding them until April 1991. There was an obvious disadvantage about that because it took us much closer to a British general election, and it is difficult to negotiate in Northern Ireland except in the middle of a parliament. There is no question that they did hold it up, and they did so famously in July 1990. They did not necessarily hold it up in the summer of 1991. The thing which held us up in the summer of 1991 was that there was no prior agreement as to who was going to chair the Strand Two talks. The only person who asked me was Lord Alderdice of the Alliance Party. The Unionists assumed that it was going to be me. The Irish government and the SDLP assumed that it was going to be alternating between Collins (the Irish Foreign Secretary) and me. We had almost given up hope at the beginning of 1991, and the reason why it did not make clear who was going to be the chairman was that I thought it more important for the talks to start than running the risk of the talks being held up further by this discussion. In other words, we would get nothing achieved before the election. Therefore, I deliberately did not raise the issue myself. When the issue was raised, it held up the talks for weeks because we had to find someone who was acceptable. To have solved all the problems in those 10 weeks, would have been exceptionally difficult. It seemed to be much more important to me that we would do two things: to get the talks started, and secondly, that we have a climate of goodwill who took part in them, so that even when the talks stop before 12 July, that there was sufficient goodwill that they would start again.

Wouldn't it have been good to extend the gap between the IGC's?

It might have been attractive to do so. The Nationalists were not prepared to accept anything longer than a ten-week gap. The Unionists believed that we were going to extend. I was absolutely clear that, since we had to have the agreement of the Irish government whatever we were going to do, it had to be proved to the Irish government that we were not playing games. The Irish government believed, I was told, that we were going to come to them with a request to extend, and when we never did, they realised that I was being serious.

It was argued that the Irish were so happy about the Anglo-Irish Agreement that they didn't necessarily have an interest in the talks process...

I don't think that's actually true. I think particularly Charles Haughey, who was coming to the end of his time as Taoiseach, had a genuine interest in securing his place in Irish history. It is perfectly true that the Irish government were prepared to let me see how far I could get without necessarily being very helpful. I acknowledge that.

Why was it so important to have the Irish government on side?

The Unionists had elevated a tactic into a principle in 1985. They had marched into a cul de sac. They had said that they were just not prepared to do business with anybody, and I realised that you couldn't in fact get anywhere with the talks unless you got the Unionists out of the cul de sac. They had got to be able to come out of it honourably. The only way to do that was for them to indicate to the rest of the Unionist parties that the Anglo-Irish Agreement was to be put into cold storage temporarily. In that respect, the Irish government had a lever of power. They had to agree that we would have a long gap between IGC's, and that Maryfield would be temporarily out of communication.

Did it occur to you that some reluctance on the Nationalist side was due to the fact that they were already thinking about how to pave a way for Sinn Fein into constitutional politics?

I think that's probably right. It would be a logical explanation of why, when we were negotiating with the constitutional parties, the Unionists were extremely decisive. In the case of the SDLP, the negotiations were much more incoherent, they were much less purposive. There are two explanations. One was that they were deliberately unpurposive, but an alternative explanation is that Hume had not shared with the other leaders of the SDLP that he was continuing these conversations with Adams. Therefore he had to make a virtue to me that he had to get all the other SDLP people on side. That may have been why the SDLP appeared to have been dragging their feet.

Was the inclusion of the UDR into the RIR a political act?

I honestly can't remember. It was a Ministry of Defence project, not a Northern Ireland Office project. We had to agree to it, but essentially it was a concern for the Ministry of Defence.

You wouldn't have strongly resisted it either?

No. It was a compliment to the UDR. It represented continuity from their point of view, but it was essentially driven from the Ministry of Defence.

Were there deliberations going as to whether the UDA should be outlawed?

Yes, we did discuss that, and I took to the view that it was not fair to whoever was acting as the duty minister during the general election, who was Lord Belstead, to put somebody other that the Secretary of State under real pressure with a security crisis during the election itself. The events which gave rise to the prescription occurred very shortly before the election.

How did you rationalise the rise in Loyalist activity?

Once the decision had been taken to prosecute Nelson it was inevitable. Once the drive against the Loyalist paramilitaries took place, a number of the older men who had been leading it – leading it in a reasonably conservative and non-aggressive manner – were removed, the younger generation that came through had the same sort of attitudes as the IRA. They had learned a lot from IRA tactics. And also, the level of hostilities from the IRA in the latter part of 1991 had been very severe. Part of the increase in Loyalist activity was because they felt that the IRA needed to be told that it was not a campaign which would go unpunished, and they themselves were vulnerable to a more purposive and pointed level of Loyalist activity. The other advantage they had was that they were less vulnerable because they were not putting the money into their own pockets. It was a generational change amongst Loyalist, and it was one that was pretty effective.

Lord Butler, 6 March 2002

Is it fair to argue that throughout the whole peace process, the Irish government was enthusiastic and imaginative whilst the British government was reluctant and needed to be pushed?

The British government had very difficult responsibilities. It had responsibilities to both Nationalists and Unionists, and it was dealing with a very difficult law and order situation. In a sense, it was easier for the Irish government to press for things than for the British government. I remember contacts in the Irish governments to say on frequent occasions: why don't you simply tell the Unionists, why don't you overbear them? History, of course, had shown that this was not a thing that you could do – you only need to think of Sunningdale and the Anglo-Irish Agreement in 1985. The British government was always between a rock and a hard place in a way in which the Irish government wasn't. The British government always had to be sure that it maintained a proper balance.

What was your first reaction when your saw the Irish draft for the Joint Declaration in June 1993?

The document was not unfamiliar to us, because it bore a strong resemblance to what had been prepared by Hume and Adams of which we had seen a version. The first reaction to it was that it was much too green to be acceptable to the Unionists, or even to the British government. It required the British government to agree to things that we could not have agreed to, for example on self-determination within Ireland as a whole. What Mr Reynolds said when he offered it was that he had reason to think that this would satisfy the Nationalists, and produce a ceasefire and peace. Well, we could see why it would satisfy the Nationalists, but we were clear that in its original form, it would not satisfy the Unionists. The initiative was welcomed – just like Hume-Adams was welcomed – but it was clear that it wouldn't be a basis for going forward without a good deal of modification.

How enthusiastic were you about this idea of a joint declaration?

We were always enthusiastic about anything that looked as if it would be acceptable to everybody, and that would further politics at the expense of violence. The difficulty, though, was exactly that: to produce something that was acceptable to all sides.

Irish diplomats have argued that the only interest of the British government in pursuing the Brooke talks was to get rid of the Anglo-Irish Agreement.

I don't think that was true at all. The motives which were very often attributed to the British government were not at all what our motives were. I think there was suspicion on all sides. As far as the British were concerned, it was true that we had no selfish economic or strategic interest in Northern Ireland. What we wanted to do was to find a way forward which would allow legitimate political debate to happen and violence to end. That was our overriding objective.

What was the function of the Downing Street Declaration?

It was something which was only agreed between the British and the Irish sides. It stated a joint position of the two governments, and that was a very important thing. It couldn't bind anyone else. As it turned out, it provided a basis on which the IRA did declare a ceasefire, and the Loyalist groups followed them. That was tremendous step forward.

Was it intended to push the Republicans into having to make a choice by uniting the whole spectrum of constitutional politics?

The fact that the British and the Irish governments were agreed on certain things meant that the terrorists couldn't look on either side. Neither Loyalists or the Republicans could look to the governments for comfort. The scope for the governments to be played off against each other was limited by this very wide measure of agreement.

Was that not achieved already with the Anglo-Irish Agreement?

This went further. It was the purpose of Sunningdale, secondly of the Anglo-Irish Agreement and thirdly of the Joint Declaration. It had the advantage over the previous two that it was acceptable to the Unionists, and that's why it provided a basis for the restoration of democratic politics.

Was there a conflict between the NIO and the Prime Minister?

I wouldn't say that was true. There were certainly different views among British ministers in the Cabinet. I wouldn't say the Northern Ireland Office was particularly sceptical.

Michael Howard, Lord Cranborne...

Yes, they were sceptical – Ken Clarke. But they were all prepared to give it a go. They were just sceptical whether it really would lead to more peaceful process, and whether it wasn't a mechanism by which the British government was led into concessions without there being any returns.

What impact did the dwindling majority of Mr Major in the Commons have on the process?

In the event, I don't think it had very much impact. Of course, the support of the Unionists in the House of Commons was very important, but there was no question of trading their support for anything in the agreement. I have always given Jim Molyneaux tremendous credit, because I don't think he ever tried to trade their support. The Unionists played a statesman-like role, they didn't try to exploit the negotiating position. The fact that the agreement was struck at all is evidence that they didn't, because they were prepared to go along with something which the Irish government could accept.

It is sometimes argued that there was a certain degree of choreography between London and Dublin, particularly after the Joint Declaration.

I was never conscious of any choreography. If you mean that the British government would say to the Irish government: 'look, you take this stance, and we'll take this, and this will please our constituencies' – that was clearly not the case.

The conflicts were thus genuine...

Yes, the disagreements were genuine when they occurred.

What was your perception of the influence of Irish America?

One was always conscious that although Clinton sincerely devoted to trying to help achieve peace in Northern Ireland, the Americans and particular the Democrats had strong domestic political pressures on them. They were always bound to have an eye to that. Overall, I don't think the American influence was malign. I think President Clinton made a positive contribution, sometimes very brave, which greatly helped. I take a slightly heretical view about the granting of the 1994 visa to Adams. I was less opposed to that than some people in the British government. The reason was that I felt that the whole purpose of our efforts was to draw Sinn Fein into political activity, and I thought that the more they were drawn into that, the more difficult it would become for them to revert. So, although it was highly irritating to the British government, I took the view at the time that it would be quite helpful in the end, and indeed it was.

Can one say that Adams and McGuinness were still regarded as doves who needed to be strengthened against the militants within their own movement?

We certainly formed the view with some evidence in 1992 and 1993 that Adams and McGuinness had decided that it was in the interests of Sinn Fein and the Nationalist cause to enter into political debate. Of course, we wanted to encourage and support that provided it was genuine. We were prepared to take some risk, to take it at its face value. We were always conscious that it was not the universal view of Sinn Fein, and certainly not the view of some in PIRA. We wanted to support and encourage them in that.

With hindsight, do you regret that the issue of decommissioning became so prominent during the ceasefire period?

No, I don't. It was absolutely common ground between us and the Irish government when the Joint Declaration was made, that the men of violence had to make a choice, that they couldn't sit at the table with a gun concealed under it. So, if they were going to take part in democratic government, they had to put the guns permanently out of use. It was right to put that choice starkly in front of them. We were unanimous in that on both sides.

Were you surprised by the prominence this issue would take during the ceasefires?

I was surprised that this became the great issue. This part of the Downing Street Declaration was agreed between us and the Irish government, and the Irish government didn't say to us at the time that this was never realistic. We believed that it was the choice that had to be made. At the time, the Irish government supported it, and indeed they went on to say that decommissioning is important and necessary. But they weren't quite as strong subsequently to say that this was a necessary condition to participate in the democratic process. But we were certainly at one in this respect at the time of the Downing Street Declaration.

The only way of ensuring that the guns weren't used were for them to be decommissioned, not least because of the implied threat that they would return to violence. At the same time, it is for sure that the

longer you go on without using the guns, the greater is the confidence that they are not going to be used again. In some respects, that provides an alternative to decommissioning.

Was it your idea that once the ceasefires were called, it would be harder for the paramilitaries to return to war, and that the ceasefires were therefore secure?

Yes. Two reasons were in mind. A ceasefire was valuable because popular opinion would so welcome it that if violence resumed there would be much less sympathy for terrorism. Also, as far as the leaders of Sinn Fein were concerned, they couldn't keep alternating. They would very much damage themselves in the light of international, and particular, American opinion, if without any good cause, they reverted to violence.

Were you surprised by the end of the ceasefire?

Yes, I was surprised. I didn't think that that was going to happen.

Was that Mr Major's view as well?

Yes.

What was your view on prisoners? Did you think at the time that that needed to become part of an overall settlement?

It was known that the Nationalists attached great importance to that, and the Loyalists too. It was unpalatable, but one thing that I was personally reassured by was that there was a strong record that people that had been imprisoned for violence were not returning to it afterwards. I thought there was a pretty good prospect of that, and that sweetened the pill of releasing them.

Were you surprised by the strong reaction of the Unionists to the framework documents?

Yes, a little. There was a good deal of mischief behind the leak. The Unionists did feel that the Nationalists were not making the progress they were expected to make. Their suspicions had increased again.

Did you think the Irish government was too slow to move on Article 2+3?

We understood the political difficulties they had with that. The practical effect of that was limited, so it was pretty much a symbolic gesture. Nonetheless, it was a necessary one to show their good faith. I wouldn't say they were too slow – they were courageous in the end.

Did they use it as a bargaining chip?

Yes, it was a bargaining chip on their part, but from our perspective, it wasn't a very effective one. It was a sign of their good faith, but it wasn't going to make a huge difference in the real world. Perhaps the Unionists attached more importance to it than we did. I don't think we ever regarded this as a stumbling block. We felt it was necessary, it needed to be done. The delay was not a great obstacle.

Are you happy with how things have developed subsequently?

I am very happy that the ceasefire exists. I am very unhappy that the goodwill between the communities has not been established. All the evidence is that the relations between the two communities in Northern Ireland seem to be deteriorating and there are clearly great fears on the Unionist side. Although it is a very good thing that the ceasefire is there, the situation won't be solved without the two constituencies developing a better attitude towards each other. That may come with the working of the Executive, but it does need to happen. The danger is that the ill-will will get to such a point that violence will break out again.

Are you happy with how the Labour government has continued the Major legacy?

Yes, I am reasonably happy with that.

Raymond Carter, 30 July 2001

What were your government's aims?

Anything has to be put into a historical context. A smaller island adjacent to a bigger island might have always have produced some tension – social, economic or political. My attitude towards Ireland long before I became a minister there was conditioned by my family background. I was a Protestant, though

not a practising one. My father, an atheist, thought that Ireland should be independent. I largely took up his point of view, and subsequent reading convinced me that Ireland should be independent and united. It didn't occur to me, however, to force it upon people.
I followed the situation in Northern Ireland very closely from Ted Heath's dissolution of Stormont, which in retrospect was not a sensible thing. It should have been suspended, and attempts should then have been made to get the Nationalist element more involved in the politics of the country. Many problems which we faced in 1976 were compounded by the fact that attempts had been made to re-establish Stormont, or the Assembly. That failed. If Stormont had not been disbanded and simply suspended, the task of re-establishing some kind of legislative body in Northern Ireland would have been easier.
However, those attempts failed and therefore I went there as a member of a ministerial team that had the task of imposing Direct Rule. It was an attempt to impose order on chaos. There was no civilian government, it could not have been put together. Cooperation between the two sides was at a minimum. I went there believing that if I could demonstrate as a minister that there were ways in which the community could live together, that that might ultimately lead back to some kind of belief that the democratic process was preferable to conflict and chaos.

What did you think of Roy Mason's approach?

Mason came from the Ministry of Defence. He came heavily influenced by his defence advisers, who told him that this was simply a security problem. And it wasn't. This was a social, poltical and an economic problem. Mason, from the moment that he took over, was determined to tackle the security aspects, and neglect the questions of constitutional reform and the re-establishment of some kind of local government. This, of course, was a decision by the Cabinet as a whole. I thought that a lot of time was lost by simply regarding the question as one of security. It was my view that I would do all I could to revive democratic elements in local government and, to provide a system in which they could sit down and work together, and also work with the Republic. I never thought that you could impose independence, but I thought that through discussion, through contacts, some of these barriers could be broken down, and people could freely decide what their future would be.

How did you perceive the influence of the Republic of Ireland?

I had mixed feelings. The problem in Ireland is an emotional one. People's attitudes, whichever side of the argument you are on, are ambivalent. As far as the Republic is concerned, they want a united Ireland, but I don't think they are too keen to have one million Protestants under their wings. They have changed a lot since then. They have given up, for example, the territorial claim which was a major step for them. As a Minister, I was always wanting to try and have contact with them down there. And eventually I was the first minister after the collapse of the Assembly to go down there and got on extremely well. My attitude was that this is a single island, a divided community, but we have to live together. My general recollection is that relationships started to improve. Irish ministers came up to Stormont, for example.

What about border security?

I don't want to give the impression that relations were fantastic. Because of the ambivalence that I mentioned earlier, the Irish still are capable of behaving in a way where their views are contradictory. On the one hand, they want to see peace and stability. On the other hand, they always want to extract something extra from the bargaining process which, at times, is in conflict with the bigger objective. I don't see that going away, even if Northern Ireland gets its own Assembly. The basic antagonism will still be there, even if there is a united Ireland. It was certainly there when I was in Northern Ireland. At a working level, though, we didn't have many difficulties, except on security where we clearly had problems.

How did you perceive the growing American concern?

I had a very good relationship with the American consul, Charlie Stout. The American senators opposed violence; they wanted to see a constitutional settlement. I saw their role as helpful... Essentially, I thought they were constructive, Moynihan especially.

How would you describe your government's economic policy?

Even Mason realised, towards the end, that it wasn't just a security problem. He had to start to deal with social and economic affairs. So, in the last 18 months, we rushed into a lot of projects like the DeLorean project. DeLorean was an absolute fiasco. I knew that at the time because I represented a car constitutency. I knew that DeLorean was a huge conman, and I said so at the time, but they saw it as an opportunity to bring jobs to West Belfast. They believed they were in competition with the Republic.

What was the nature of the difficulties in building more houses in Belfast?

They were partly of a sectarian nature. The biggest housing pressure was on the Catholic community, and finding non-controversial areas, particularly in Belfats, was very difficult. I did eventually get through a major extension in West Belfast, Poleglass. I was heavily opposed on that by the Protestants. There was a lot of pressure on me to disapprove of the development. I went through with it, and I was congratulated by a lot of Nationalists for sticking to my guns.

Was that a Belfast problem?

If you ask Catholics West of the Bann, they would say they didn't get any proper housing either. I looked at the evidence, and I never found anything to back that claim up. There are housing problems in some areas, but in general, building new houses wasn't a particular problem.

Have Catholics benefited from Direct Rule?

We've been wanting to do whatever we could to alleviate discrimination, and to make it possible for all members of the community – they are British subjects after all – to enjoy the same standard of living. It is very difficult because discrimination did and will still apply in employment.

Was the area of need programme an attempt to provide 'bread and circusses', as some authors claim?

No, I don't think so at all. This was a situation in which you did what you could. You were trying to impose on a chaotic situation some degree of order, some stability, some sense of social coehsiveness. You could have, as a broad umbrella, an objective which looked like a strategy, but actually what you were trying to do was to make small advances wherever you could. If the building of a sports centre was a contribution, you did it. If building a road would help, if attracting inward investment would help, you did it.
Towards the end, when we were approaching the 1980s, there was a realisation that economic development was absolutely critical. Security was important, but if you kept up that sort of single-pronged approach to the problem, you weren't going to get anywhere. It is a tragedy that we lost the election because I think, at that point, we were beginning to make progress. Of course, the Conservatives came in, and they were to the Nationalists like a red rag to a bull. In fact, Lord Carver, who was chief of the general staff, told me on a plane to Belfast that he thought that when Labour lost the election in 1970, you would have started to have dealt with Northern Ireland in a much more sympathetic way than the Conservatives did. I think that's probably true.

How did you live through the Protestant strike in 1977?

That was no problem at all. It was very evident, right from the outset, that paramilitaries weren't supporting that dispute in the way that they had supported the Ulster Workers' Strike. It never was going to be a winner. At this time, the grassroots of working class society in Protestant Belfast were beginning to generate their own political attitudes. They weren't any longer under the thumb of the Unionist party or Paisley. They were beginning to think for themselves.

Do you think that the resistance to the strike endeared you to the Cahtolic community?

I think it helped. They used to say that police would never shoot at Protestants. But I think that the police came out of the Troubles quite well. They always tried to be quite impartial, even though they were almost exclusively Protestant.

How did you see the developing situation in the prisons?

There was no way the government could have given way on that.

Do you think Thatcher's response was correct?

Oh, yes. In 1981, Don Concannon actually went to Bobby Sands and visited him in prison to tell him that the Labour Party would not support him. It would have given legitimacy to their acts, that killing a policeman is a justifiable act. You can't do it, you simply can't do it, or you capitulate.

Dou you think it was orchestrated from outside?

I would say that the IRA leadership had an awful lot to do with it. They had to sanction the dirty protests and the hunger strike. They wouldn't have done it would it not have been sanctioned.

Did you attempt to give back some of local powers?

No, things had not moved. If I had been there a bit longer, it might have happened. There was a lot of agitation, but it was never a great pressure. I visited every single of the 26 districts twice. It was an arduous task. I used to stay in those communitiies, which the security forces weren't happy about. But I

thought: if i can't do this, what kind of credibility do I have? I went all through Derry/Londonderry, on to the Creggan estate. I did everything I possibly could to show that life had a certain normality.

Would you say that British rule was some form of benign colonialism?

No. My own view is that if we can produce any kind of settlement there, England would be very pleased to leave. Scotland is a different matter. Scotland could potentially have the same problems as Northern Ireland. It is a very divided community. It's one of the problems the Scots could face if they ever get full independence. It's much more of a Scottish problem than an English one. I always felt that, as an Englishman there, I was sharing a burden of a problem that wasn't mine. I used to say that the one thing that would unite the factions is the sight of an Englishman.

You never regarded Direct Rule as a permanent solution?

No. My personal view was that this was a job where I had to lay the foundations that would enable a future British government to withdraw. There is no way that an English government can run Northern Ireland. It is quite impossible. It has to come out at some stage. You couldn't come out at the moment, there would be an almighty bloodbath. But the objective is to create the conditions in which you can leave. That's always been the objective. I think the Conservatives, when they went back in 1979, would for a very brief period have believed that the Union was vital to the existence of Great Britain, but even they started to change. It was in fact Thatcher who concluded the Anglo-Irish Agreement. So they changed quite a lot over the course of their period of office.

Lord Cope, 5 March 2002

What was the situation like when you started in office, in mid 1989?

It was a time right in the middle of the whole history. The security situation remained extremely tough, but reasonably steady. There weren't some of the huge incidents. Nor was there much moving on the peace front. We were trying to open up negotiations, but they didn't really get going until much later. The Unionist attitudes had changed pretty much a year or two before, in particular because of the Anglo-Irish Agreement, which they saw as a huge sell-out. By the time I got there, the protests had reached a steady stage. They were extremely wary about trusting the government again, and they constantly hated the Anglo-Irish Secretariat at Maryfield. It looked to them as an effort to give the Irish government some control over what the British government did. I regularly met our counterparts from the Irish Republic, to discuss the security situation among other things.

Brooke, however, said that there was now sufficient convergence to explore the possibility of inter-party talks.

Yes, and that's what I meant by saying that we were trying to get the peace process moving. It was quite hard work at that point. A lot of talking went on, a lot of discussion within government on how to do it: angels dancing on pins. A certain amount of talking went on with intermediaries and the IRA. There were a number of individuals – priests and others – who were in touch with them, and who were saying that if only you do this, they will do that. There was a huge number of people who wanted to see movement towards reconciliation. Some of it was in particular areas, such as the integration of schools. Others were talking to the IRA and to us, thereby ensuring that we understood what their thinking was.

My job was to try and keep the lid on the security situation as much as possible, to try and make sure that we didn't lose the war too much. We all understood that it wasn't a war we could win, in the sense that one day people would just walk off. We had to try and keep on top of the security situation and prevent the terrorists from doing ghastly things. I was very concerned to develop the anti-rackets side. It seemed to me that if we could try to reduce the sources of money, that would help. The rackets had built up, and we had a powerful unit which was trying to achieve that.

Brooke said that the IRA could not be defeated. Was that a mistake?

Peter Brooke is a very honest and thoughtful man, and he assumes that everyone else is. Politically, it may not have been very wise, but certainly we understood that and believed it to be accurate. After all, a few years later, it was the realisation that they couldn't win, and nor could we, that started the peace process going. That's what Peter tried by doing that, and it ultimately worked in the long term. In the short term, it was probably a mistake.

In hindsight, would you say that the British government won the conflict?

I don't think either side has won the war. Britain hasn't lost it. It's all coming in the right direction, yet at the same time we have given away a lot in the process. It's my view that the Labour government made

a huge mistake in letting the prisoners out in exchange simply for a hope of goodwill, and not in exchange for really significant decommissioning of weapons. Letting out the prisoners, who are very important in the psychological, ought to have been much more closely tied to the ending of the war, and the mark of the ending of the war is when they lay down their arms. The trouble is that the IRA has always seen it as a surrender. PIRA has always made a big mistake in not going in for the decommissioning of weapons at the time of the Good Friday Agreement, because it would have been of huge symbolical importance without necessarily hindering their ability to wind up the war again when things went wrong.

Were Adams and McGuinness in a position to deliver the movement?

Only within limits. In any case, I don't think they wanted to try very much. Adams has always seen that the ballot box had a part to play, that the war shouldn't be carried on simply for its own sake, that it had a purpose. A lot of their people thought that it was a purpose of itself. PIRA was in any case very cellular. Even if Adams had wanted to, he could not have simply said: let's walk in this, or another, direction. A formal army with good morale can do that, but a mob like that can't. The motivation was extremely strong in the individual cells, and it needed to be. By the time I was involved, they had become very sophisticated. There is a tendency to think of terrorist operations as very crude, but they were very sophisticated in many things. Our main aim was always to bring them to court and convict them by as normal and legal a process as possible. It wasn't totally normal because they bombed the courts and threatened the witnesses, so we needed Diplock courts, etc. They subverted the legal process, but they also looked very carefully at on what basis people got convicted, so that they could learn from it.

Was there any change within the Republican movement at the time?

No. Over the long term, there was a shift towards thinking that it could be done, and an understanding that they couldn't win by war. The Loyalist side we always had to think about, but I continue to think that if you can solve the problem without giving away everything in political terms to the Republican side, then the Loyalists will cease to exist.

The Mafia started as an Sicilian independence movement, but it had become a racket arrangement. My concern was that the whole thing was getting economically built in. Whilst the fight for a united Ireland had provided the momentum for terrorism, we were getting to the stage where the rackets and the lifestyle and the income were starting to dominate their considerations. There are large parts of Belfast where there aren't any pubs, only clubs. And the clubs are run, directly or indirectly, by the terrorist organisations. The same was true for the taxis. Large sections were run by the relevant groups. It worried me quite a lot. At a certain point, part of what PIRA was doing was to attack economic targets, and we tried to point this out, because they were trying to destroy their own people's jobs, as well as Protestant jobs. We were desperately trying to get economic development going, because when people are poor, the situation always deteriorates.

The Stevens report was published at the time. Did that trigger any consequences?

Not so much on government policy, but it did worry us as to whether or not individual members of the security forces had co-operated, and we were very anxious that they should not. It was a disciplinary matter, to make sure that we had a grip on the security forces. I am a fan of the RUC in the way they fought the IRA. I was protected very well, but I met people every day who were far more exposed than I ever was. There were various incidents which demonstrated what a dangerous business it was to be a police constable. And this applied, in particular, to the Ulster Defence Regiment. They also saw the most horrific things. In one sense, I was always impressed by the sheer dedication, year after year, by the RUC in particular. It amazed me that there weren't more incidents of collusion, but at the same time it was extremely important that there should not be. One of the effects of the fuss with the Protestant side after the Anglo-Irish Agreement was that the RUC found themselves holding the line against the Loyalist terrorists. That became much more normal.

Lord Dubs, 7 March 2002

What difference did the election victory in 1997 make?

I think it made a large difference. I don't want to take away from what the previous government did, but the process got stuck, and having a new government gave us the chance to start again. Very importantly, it was a commitment by Tony Blair. His first major speech as a Prime Minister was in Belfast – that sent a very important signal.

Do you think the Labour's big majority in the House of Commons helped?

It's better to have a big majority, so the government doesn't rely on Ulster Unionist votes in the House of Commons. I think, provided there is a clear majority, it didn't matter how big the majority was. Clearly, it was a government that could be confident because of its public backing.

Did you encounter suspicions in your dealings with Unionists, particularly because of Labour's traditional policy of Irish unity by consent?

Yes, there was suspicion indeed. They dragged out Hansard and told me that I wasn't fit to do the job because I had talked about unity by consent ten years before in the House of Commons.

Did that mean you had to reassure the Unionists?

We all said that there would be no change without the majority of the population wanting it, and that is our clear policy.

Violence was going on. Where would the government have drawn the line and excluded one or more of the parties that were linked to paramilitaries?

It would have been a disaster if Sinn Fein hadn't been at the talks. There wouldn't have been a peace process. What's the point of having a peace process if it doesn't involve the people who have links with the terrorists? The previous attempts all excluded Sinn Fein/IRA, and it wasn't possible. It's like having peace talks in the Middle East without the Palestinians – it wouldn't mean anything.

Did you see people like Adams and McGuinness as doves who needed to be strengthened against militants within their movement?

My opinion is that at some point, way back, Gerry Adams decided that they weren't getting anywhere with the military campaign. He took some time to persuade some of his Sinn Fein people and some of the active IRA people that this was the way forward. But, there has always been tension, and that is the reason why I believe that the IRA couldn't concede on the issue of decommissioning. Adams, of course, wanted to avoid a big horizontal split in the IRA, with the lower levels of the IRA going away. Adams clearly felt that he had little room for manoeuvre despite the pressure from the Unionists. I think that paramilitary beatings and shooting would go on in each of the communities in any case. I think they are a function of the paramilitary wings, trying to assert control in their local areas. It's a nasty business, but life is still a lot better than before the ceasefires.

Was it the aim to strengthen Trimble?

Absolutely. I think the whole of government policy has been to try and support Trimble against the DUP and against the hard-line members of his party. The government has turned over backwards, because without Trimble there is the danger that the Ulster Unionists would turn against the Belfast Agreement. It is difficult because it means that you always have to look at what Trimble's position is within his own party. You have to separate genuine opposition to Trimble's position from bluff by him to advance his position during negotiations. I think he's had a lot of disloyal people within his party, and there are still big threats to his position.

How would you describe the state of Anglo-Irish relations during the negotiations?

British-Irish relations got very good. Without them, we wouldn't have moved towards the Belfast Agreement. They became first class at every level, whether it was at Prime Ministerial or ministerial level, at civil service or even between the RUC and the Garda. They are probably the best they have ever been.

What do you think was the role of Irish America?

I think John Hume played a significant part in persuading Irish America of the value of constitutional politics. For example, he mobilised the active support of significant Democrats like Teddy Kennedy. Historically, the IRA got a lot of money and support from Irish America. If we had supported al-Qaeda in half the way the Americans supported the IRA, they would be very mad with us, to say the least. I think the Americans have applied awful double-standards in condoning support for terrorism here. More recently, however, they have become more helpful and supportive. The majority of Americans, who had supported terrorism and violence here, support the Belfast Agreement and the peace process now. I think John Hume was helpful in achieving this, but also Adams and McGuinness. Clinton and Mitchell played a very significant part in the peace process. Clinton's work behind the scenes, as well as the enormous contribution George Mitchell made, were absolutely invaluable.

What was the consensus about decommissioning during the negotiations?

I think there were different views about that. Not everything in the Belfast Agreement is perfect, but it's no good saying that we should have done it differently. If we had done it differently, there would be no Belfast Agreement. The rather weak wording on decommissioning was probably the best that one could get. My feeling is that the Sinn Fein said that they would do the best to get decommissioning, but it depended on the difficult situation in their own movement, that is, they were trying to avoid defections. When 60 per cent of the IRA supported the Agreement, it wasn't enough – it had to be 80 per cent. Those figures were simply speculation, but they indicate that Adams needed a high level of support before he could feel confident about the next move, and that's taken some time.

I think that they did want decommissioning, but they were not prepared to do it at the risk of the IRA factionalising. As a result, their scope for manoeuvre was limited. I think that they hoped that they could avoid it altogether. In the end, I believe, the pressure on them from various source, for example Washington, became very strong.

Where did the pressure for employment equality come from?

If you set it in a historical context, Britain has managed Northern Ireland very badly. We allowed awful discrimination to go on, so there was a feeling here, in Dublin and New York and – above all – within the Nationalist community, that his had to stop. The previous government would have tackled it as well, but I think the Belfast Agreement produced a more dramatic package of measure, with the Human Rights Commission, the Equality Commission, etc.

Sir Philip Goodhart, 10 July 2001

What was the main influence on the formulation of Northern Ireland policy when you entered office in 1979?

The main factor that was predominant when I was involved in Northern Ireland was the fact that, shortly before the election of 1979, Margaret Thatcher's almost closest political friend, Airey Neave, who had been the shadow spkesman on Northern Ireland, and who had studied Northern Ireland for a considerable period, was blown up in his car, leaving the House of Commons. This had a profound impact on policy development over the next couple of years.

The policy that had been laid down in the manifesto for Northern Ireland was of course written by Airey, and there's no doubt that he would have put considerable energy into implementing it if he had survived. However, he did not survive, and the key factor in the period of which I have knowledge is that he was replaced by Humphrey Atkins, who had been the chief whip for years, but who basically had no knowledge of Northern Ireland at all. At the same time, the head of the civil service in Northern Ireland was replaced by someone who had got great power and drive, but again had no knowledge of Northern Ireland at all. So, instead of coming into office with a prepared policy – though a policy that would have been difficult to implement – you had people who knew nothing, which meant that there wasn't any particular policy for a considerable period.

Eventually you had a vacuum of policy for the next two years. Instead of a new government arriving with people who knew the situation, and who knew in their own minds what they wanted to do, you had a Secretary of State who knew what words the manifesto said, and who knew what they meant, but who had no particular attachment to them. He realised that it was necessary to proceed with extreme caution, which he did. On the whole, one followed pretty much the policy one had inherited.

Was there any American influence that would have influenced the formulation of policy?

On the whole, at that particular stage, in 1979, I don't remember that happening at all.

Was the Constitutional Conference not a reaction to American influence, as many academics argue?

No, not at all.

What was the idea behind the Constitutional Conference?

To do something. Humphrey was not a close friend [to Thatcher] in the way Airey Neave had been. I would doubt whether America had any major factor on this at all. What I would think happened was that one would have a programme which would hand back certain powers to the local people, and we hadn't implemented it. So, what do we do? If in doubt, have a conference! What's your policy? Our policy is to have a conference! And as he weren't to implement immediately the policy on which we were elected, you needed something else, and possibly something would be agreed by all those around.

Did the election of Reagan (in November 1980) made any difference?

No. I think that there's always a tendency to blame outside interference. I think that the American impact, right until the late years of Clinton, tended to be exaggerated, particularly by the Unionist side. The two years that I was a minister in Northern Ireland, I don't recall having any discussion with any Americans. I don't recall having met the American consul in Belfast. There was always a tendency on the part of the Unionists to say: this is formented by American money and American influence. I would say to the Unionist leaders: there's more money to be raised for the IRA in London or Liverpool or Glasgow than in the whole of the United States. But it suited people on all sides to magnify the idea of American support for the IRA and Sinn Fein, that if it hadn't been for the people over the ocean it would have been easier. It was a negligible factor.

What was the effect of the events on 27 august 1979, when Mountbatten was assassinated and 18 soldiers were killed at Warrenpoint?

On that day, I happened to be in the United States of America, in Wyoming. Word came through first of the Mountbatten murder. I remember that we had dinner with the Rockefellers, and we all stood for a minute of silence. That was a nice gesture. I then flew straight back, thinking that it would be a moment of crisis, and that i ought to get back as quickly as i could to see what was happening. My main impression was that i could as well have stayed on holiday: the immediate impact wasn't really great, and it didn't produce any major change in policy.

How were relations between your government and the Republic of Ireland?

I was responsible for local government and environment. This meant that one had responsibility for everything which would normally be carried out by a local council, with the exception of education. There were quite a lot of issues which had cross-border implications. After three or four months, I realised that I did not even know the name of the Minister for Environment in Dublin. So I thought, let's go and see how long I can go along without knowing the name of my opposite number, and it was about a year that went by. There really was no cross-border, regular cooperation, on things one would normally expect, like transport and water.

What was your attitude towards devolution?

I wouldn't have said that devolution had been tried and hadn't worked. Certainly, as far as my period was concerned, my interest was to try and get more responsibility passed down to local councils. When I took responsibility in 1979, the local councils had responsibility for setting the temperature in municipal swimming pools, and not much else. It was certainly true that there was much discrimination at the local government level. Arguably, the whole thing started because in a council fairly close to Londonderry, a house which was going to be given to a Catholic family with three or four children was in fact given to a Protestant unmarried woman. It was a case of blatant discrimination which sparked the civil rights movement.

I wanted to hand some of the powers back. First of all, street lighting had very few political connotations. It seemed to me that this would not stir up a lot of controversy. Yet when I was giving a dinner for local notables in the Newry area, Seamus Mallon, who had been invited and refused to come because the local head of the RUC was coming too, told me – before the dinner - that it was impossible to maintain a street light on a non-partisan, non-sectarian basis. In a way, that were the most depressing 45 minutes I had. If you can't get local responsibilities for street lighting on a bipartisan basis, what the hell can one do? We didn't get that through, and for years, for decades even, responsibility for every street light in Northern Ireland rested in the House of Commons. So, one can't say that devolution hadn't been tried. It never got off the ground.

Was it that Thatcher, therefore, attempted to try something different by cooperating closer with the government of the Republic?

I wouldn't think that the murder of Airey Neave made Maggie [Thatcher] think that she must avenge the death. On the whole, if people came along and said we have this idea, let's try, she would consider it. I think that one can put a certain amount to the fact that FitzGerald was in power in the Republic, and he was a man of great charme. Maggie was quite susceptible to charme, and I think that if she had been dealing with, say, Charles Haughey, it would never had got off the ground at all. I think there was a sort of personal rapport to a degree.

Can you remember the hungerstrike? Do you think your government committed any serious mistakes in handling them?

No, I don't think so. You have to remember that, as far as most of the Unionist side was concerned, and as far as quiet a lot of the governmental machine was concerned, Sinn Fein was looked upon with the same enthusiasm as one might have looked upon a group of Nazis, and if Rudolf Heß wants to starve himself to death, so be it. It was the same feeling of antipathy. To a degree, Sinn Fein/IRA was regarded as more of a fascist organisation than an ordinary Western democratic organisation. Indeed, those people were regarded as semi-criminal, more criminal than political.

Were you surprised, then, that more than 100,000 people turned up at the funeral of Bobby Sands?

Yes, but then, a lot of fascist parties manage to attract a lot of support. To be fascist is not necessarily to be unpopular.

I think that, on the whole, it is fair to say that the British people have not appreciated the depth of feeling the Great Hunger produced, and the feeling amongst a large section of the Irish Catholic community, and that 150 years ago, Ireland had been destroyed by the British government. I would dispute that version of history, but it is the perception. One has just not appreciated what actually happened and what the psyche is. Fairly soon after I got to Nothern Ireland I went back to all the secondary schools in my constituency, and I asked: what do we teach about the great hunger? If anything was taught at all, it was about one hour.

I don't think that the British government did adopt a deliberate policy of starving the Irish. It was mismanagement and plain ignorance. Queen Victoria had a tea party to raise funds, but still, the tragedy happened, and we have forgotten about it completely. Most people have no idea that it actually happened at all. In a way, I think, looking at it from a Sinn Fein point of view, it's as if a 150 years after the Holocaust, this was totally obliterated from education in Germany. It is difficult to understand, and I always had the feeling that we didn't appreciate what motivated the hatred on the part of some people against the continued British presence.

Where was policy on Nothern Ireland made? In the foreign office, as Enoch Powell claimed?

Enoch was rabbit on the issue. Enoch, although in his later political life he was very anti-European Union, he was also fanatically anti-American, and he would have given all possible impetus to the idea that the Foreign Office was selling out because of American pressure. But it was daft, it didn't happen.

The ideas would have come more from the official side, and then the political side. Willie [Whitelaw] was interested, but none of the other people in the Cabinet had any particular personal, emotional involvement with Northern Ireland. I think that Willie would have thought: right, I got close, if we try a bit harder again, maybe it would happen.

Sir Alan Goodison, 19 November 2001

Can you briefly describe your involvement in the Anglo-Irish process?

I went to Dublin immediately after a general election in the UK in which Sinn Fein had made very substantial advances in numbers of votes, and that of course was a matter of great concern to the British and Irish governments. I don't remember precisely how long the Fine Gael government had been going, but I am sure it had only been a few months, and Michael Lillis had been appointed Head of the Anglo-Irish bureau in the Department of Foreign Affairs. He was to prove a crucial figure. It was with him with whom I conducted most of my business. It was quite soon after my arrival that I began to realise that the Irish government was genuinely seeking some kind of accommodation with the British government over Northern Ireland, though they hoped that it would lead to what I can only call some kind of Mitbestimmung. They wanted a voice in Northern Ireland affairs. Michael had developed ideas about how this could be done, and the crucial initial contact was what became known as the Walk by the Canal, when he took David Goodall for a walk in central Dublin and outlined his ideas. The British government was of course anxious to reduce the influence of Sinn Fein and gradually became persuaded that the best way of doing that was to enable the Irish government to speak for the Nationalists. The Nationalists lacked an effective voice despite the importance of John Hume. The British really accepted the Irish thesis that they could be valid interlocutors on behalf of the Nationalist minority in Northern Ireland. I can recall receiving a telegram which asked what price the Irish government would require for an arrangement of this kind, and I replied that what they were looking for was joint sovereignty over the North. That was not ever accepted by the British government, partly because they were wedded to the democratic process, and believed they could not concede any form of sovereignty to another state without the consent of the people of Northern Ireland, which everybody knew the majority would not offer. I can recall going to a meeting at Chequers where various alternatives were discussed by the Prime Minister with Jim Prior, Geoffrey Howe and a number of senior civil servants. That meeting didn't reach any conclusion but it was clear that Mrs Thatcher was

attracted by the possibility of some kind of settlement in the North which might increase her reputation as a statesman. That was how she saw the importance of the issue.
So, preliminary contacts went on, largely through David Goodall, but also through me because I was there all the time. I do not recall clearly the process by which we reached the negotiating table but of course it took a long time, and when the negotiations began they were very intensive. We met every fortnight, if not once a week. I attended all the meetings, as did my opposite number Noel Dorr, who was the Irish Ambassador in London. He compiled a record much more extensive than anything in British hands. They were, after all, concerned with a principal issue in Irish foreign policy, whereas Northern ireland was only one of the subjects the British government had to deal with.
It was unfortunate that we concluded our discussions in July 1985 because Mrs Thatcher then decided that she could not sign the Agreement until Parliament was in session, which meant that it had to be delayed until November, so that it could be placed before Parliament for ratification. No real work was done on the Agreement after July 1985. We were just waiting until the British Parliament reassembled. On the Irish side, however, there had been considerable discussions with the SDLP. They had been softening up the press in expectation of the Agreement.
Then, I was there for a year after the signature of the Agreement, during which time there was a notable change in my duties. Up to the Agreement, I had been the recipient of all the Irish complaints about border violations. After the establishment of the Irish office in Belfast, the flow of such complaints dried up completely, and the office was used as a liaison channel.

How did you make it clear to the Irish government that joint sovereignty was not on?

It was considered, but it was never accepted. Since it was clearly a vital part of the Irish case, it was given serious consideration. Again, I think, it was made clear in direct discussions with the Cabinet office, rather than with me. Nevertheless, that British case was never accepted by the Irish. They were pressing for it all the time. In the same way, the British government had an aim which was never fulfilled, which was the abrogation of the clauses in the Irish constitution laying claim to the whole territory of the island of Ireland. The British government was anxious to get rid of this obstacle to Protestant acquiescence. But the Irish made it clear at the time that they did not think that they could concede a change in the Constitution which would be subject to a referendum. They did not believe that the people would vote for it unless there was some concession on sovereignty.

How do you recall the outburst of Mrs Thatcher, when – in November 1984 – she declared all the New Ireland Forum options to be 'out'?

I think that what she said was typcially insensitive. Nevertheless, it cleared the air by drawing a line around what she was willing to do. The meeting itself had been very successful, but it had not involved detailed discussion of the recommendations of the Forum. So she used the press conference to give her opinion in a typical forthright way. In that sense, it was healthy, but it was very embarrassing. I was summoned back to Dublin and saw Garret (FitzGerald) as soon as I arrived back...

What was the influence of Irish America?

I don't recall the Americans making any kind of approach to me. Of course, the Irish were continually in touch with American leaders and attached a great deal of importance to that. The Americans were also saying things to the British government in London. The speaker of the House of Represenatives was important in this.

Did the Irish government play the American card?

The Irish government played every card they had. I entirely agree with that.

Were you surprised by the Unionist reaction to the Agreement?

It was perfectly clear that they were going to object. That is why we didn't tell them. It had been decided that the only thing to do was to sign the Agreement and bear the trouble from the Unionists. There was no point in consulting the Unionists. Neither did the British government consult the Nationalists. It didn't need to. I had a strong impression in the final discussions of the Agreement, when it was finalised, that Mr Hume and Garret FitzGerald were in the room next door. They never appeared, but members of the Irish delegation disappeared from time to time and clearly came back with new instructions.

Do you think the Unionist outrage was justified?

The Unionists, of course, were looking for a fight. They would complain about anything.

Do you think that the Agreement has been a success?

It met the aims that had been set [an end to 'megaphone diplomacy', increased border co-operation, containing Sinn Fein]. More, I have been told, that Gerry Adams for the first time decided on the basis

of the Anglo-Irish Agreement that the British government really wanted a settlement, and really meant what it said, and therefore that political action was more likely to succeed than military action.

Do you think the Agreement was concluded to entice the Unionists to participate in power-sharing?

Certainly, because the text of the Agreement makes that clear. That was an explicit motive on both sides.

On what side was the motivation stronger?

I couldn't say. A large measure of agreement subsisted between the two sides. We were all working together for an effective agreement. We were not confrontatoinal in any way. Each side had certain agendas that we had spoken about. Nevertheless, the general atmosphere was one of working together to get a document that we could present to the people on the islands.

Do you think the Agreement made the Irish government more sensitive towards the Unionist case?

Yes, I think it did. They were fully aware of the Unionists. But they weren't really their constituency. Until the signature of the Agreement, they felt that it was the job of the British to deal with them. Afterwards, they had an interest in gaining Unionist consent.

Can you recall any significant changes after the Agreement?

The whole atmosphere was different. The whole tone of our relationship changed. In the first years, though, it wasn't so easy. The Irish had expectations that weren't fulfilled. They had hoped that there would be developments in the field of justice and the courts, which the British government did not concede. So, in a way, the were disappointed that less came out of the Agreement than they had hoped. There was nothing that resembled joint sovereignty.

What were the main sticking points?

Certainly there was this question of joint courts which was not addressed. It was postponed and, in fact, killed. There was also the question of releasing prisoners. The Irish were very anxious that there should be a programme of the kind we saw later. Again, that was killed. I don't know precisely what was in the Brisih government's mind at the time. The Irish government thought that the Northern Ireland Office, that Sir Robert Andrew, had had a bad effect on the negotiations, and on the subsequent activities.

Could one speak of a divergence of interest between the Northern Ireland and Foreign Office?

Yes, naturally, there was a difference between my attitude and theirs, because my job was to promote Anglo-Irish relations. That was generally the job of the Foreign Office. It was not our job to administer part of the United Kingdom. Our aims were, therefore, not precisely the same.

Lord Gowrie, 13 December 2001

What was the political impact of the hunger strikes?

It brought to an end the idea that the province could be governed as part of the United Kingdom; that henceforward there would be a series of masks and disguises for the involvement of the government of the Republic in the affairs of the province. To that degree, I therefore think that the hunger strikes were a successful endeavour.

Do you think the emergence of Sinn Fein as a political force was of any significance?

Sinn Fein was always a political as well as terrorist movement. The composition of the IRA was basically that of an old military aristocracy, descending very often from the parents and grandparents of previous IRA members. I remember being startled that most of the killers came from 16 families. It was a sort of *Junker* brigade, many coming from County Monaghan. The leadership was educated and middle-class, and Adams has always been a clever politician. He was, in a later time than mine, responsible for bringing McGuinness and other along with him.
Your question is related to the famous statement about the Armalite in the one hand, and the ballot box in the other. It has proved more successful than I thought it would, because the second generation of constitutional Nationalists have not been figures of such charisma and importance as the figures of Sinn Fein.

Did it have any immediate impact on the government?

I don't think it did, expect subconsciously. However, I had a rather idiosyncratic interpretation of the events. The main work I was doing was to bring an end to the hunger strikes, which meant – effectively – to arrange a capitulation which did not look to the government like capitulation because Mrs Thatcher was not prepared to do that, and in fact she didn't. We made use of the fact that the thing was collapsing internally. It would have come to an end in any case. To that degree, the government won. Strongly Republican figures, like Denis Faul, were determined to bring it to an end, because of the pressure from the families.
As always, there was an element of black comical farce. The English are an empirical civilisation who make a bank deposit of their symbolism through ceremonies in the monarchy, but otherwise do not give any attention to symbolism. The Irish, on the other hand, were perfectly content with English methods of administration, but are deeply interested in cultural and other symbols. Mrs Thatcher is a remarkable politician, but she is braindead at symbolic content. That is not her field. The black comic element was that the notion was one of criminalisation. The good logical empirical British mind said: a crime is a crime is a crime. They therefore wanted the prisoner camps as if they were prisoner of war camps. Because of the last war, the rhetoric of the prison camp is quite deep in British camps. The hunger strike was partly about that symbolism.
Indeed, Mrs Thatcher and most of the British governments in the end turned out to be quite helpful because it enabled the Anglo-Irish Agreement to be set up. They treated that as something practical we might need to do, but it introduced the all-important symbol, that is, that the government of Ireland cannot be done without Dublin. Reverting to a more English attitude, it is also an empirical necessity, because there is no quarrel between the government of the Republic and London. Both London and Dublin are affected by the colossal nuisance and tragedy in the North.

Was there a fear on the British side, like on the Irish side, that Sinn Fein would replace SDLP as major constitutional Nationalist party in the province?

I found that the British were insufficiently anxious about this, and I as someone who comes from the Republic, was anxious about it. Garret was broadly speaking right, but he got his timing wrong. There was still a lot of energy and dynamism in the constitutional parties. There was also, later, the arrival of some talent in the Unionist Party in the form of Trimble. This anxiety about Sinn Fein, however, is still there. It is likely that they will make gains at the expense of the Nationalists in the North. The problem is that they had had a setback through the association with terrorism, and you noticed that they scored an own goal in Colombia.
The Republic has proportional representation, and that means that the small parties can get some power, and I remain rather concerned about that. On the other hand, the Republic has changed out of all recognition, and it is therefore a less fertile ground. It is a more stable society now.

Were you surprised that 100,000 'decent' Catholics turned out at the funerals?

I wasn't surprised. I grew up in County Donegal. I went back to the town where I grew up, and they greeted me very warmly as someone who might help, but they were all wearing black flags. Hence, I wasn't – but the government might have been. They chose the wrong Prime Minister. As a protest, it would have been quite effective against any British Prime Minister except Margaret. She has a fiercely logical mind.
...
I don't sentimentalise with Sinn Fein. There are fascistic correspondencies, for example the internal disciplining, the thuggishness, the racketeering and corruption. These are not good people. Where, unfortunately, the harder men on this issue are right is that we are a constitutional member of the European Community which still has no-go areas and armed gangs. That would not be tolerated in Germany.
Part of the policy which has emerged at the time is to create an environment of co-operation between Dublin and London, which makes a less favourable atmosphere for bully-techniques of this kind to operate.

Do you think to uphold the rule of law was a basic instinct of the British government in Northern Ireland?

In theory that's its policy. In practice, it couldn't operate in traditional terms of the rule of law. We knew about internment, we knew about Diplock Courts. Even now, we have a major crisis about the investigation into the Omagh bombings being stalled, even though everyone knows who did them, by the hangover of espionage and the protection of informers. The natural processes of civil justice are not able to proceed properly.

Was there – at that time – any point in talking to Sinn Fein?

The convention was that the officials talked to Sinn Fein, and the ministers didn't. Later, under Major, Michael Ancram talked to them. I wanted to talk to Adams, but I was refused, I wasn't allowed to do that. It seemed to be inevitable that sooner or later it had to be done.

What did you want to talk about with Adams?

I wanted to talk about the only subject there is: about how to move the conflict into legitimate politics in the way John Hume did. The irony is that the achievement of John Hume was at the expense of constitutional Nationalism.

What was your explanation for shoot-to-kill?

I am certain that ministers were covering for excessive, though understandable, reactions by the police. The police exceeded what they should have done. There can be no doubt about that.

Did ministers not know enough about what the security forces were doing?

Knowing to be really effective means to know in advance. Minister did not know in advance. When things had happened, the only way I felt I could get out of it was to say: if it could be shown that there was a shoot to kill policy, I would resign because a I have to decide and instruct a policy. In some cases, I don't think the police would be doing it to innocent people.

Wasn't it a contradiction that you are asked to take responsibility whilst not having full control?

You are dealing here with a very deep and profound issue, which is that Northern Ireland is not a place that the British ever felt they have ruled. It was always quasi-autonomous. It was a coup of Ted Heath that brought us in there. There were no democratic institutions, no one elected us, no one even voted Conservative of Labour. Then something went wrong, you had to move in, and you realised that you had to deal with people with a completely different set of assumptions about politics, about democracy, about employment, about everything.
Northern Ireland is the size of Yorkshire. It is the population of Manchester. But it had a Prime Minister, a Cabinet, a Home Secretary, and so on. It was a mini-state. The British paid for it, and then they forgot about it. We then went in there and ministers were deciding even who should collect the rubbish. Surely, politicians take responsibility for the actions of public servants, but you have to be a little bit indulgent towards what was effectively an occupying power.

Do you think there was any scope to toughen security measures?

I think we did rather well on those. The weakness was in the prison service. Effectively, the prisoners got their way. The government pretended they didn't, but they did. The prison service was mostly Protestant working-class, and even though Mrs Thatcher had a reputation for not giving in to the unions, we did it all the time in the case of the prison unions in Northern Ireland. The only alternative was to march the Army into the prisons, the symbolism of which the British government did not want. It would have made a nonsense of the idea that they committed civil crimes. If you had people in military uniform running the prison, that idea would have looked rather silly. They were getting ludicrous amounts of pay, they were getting lazy, and as a result, the prisoners broke out.

How important was public opinion at home?

My view is that the British have felt that for years, that we should get out. In the main, the British would sell Northern Ireland for five pounds. They have no interest in it whatsoever. It's a quarrel between two communities, none of which the British identify with. The British presence has been a demand, a government imperative of the Republic of Ireland, which has hardly been able to cope with the unresolved issue of reunification. The British were there because of the South, for no other reason. In the long run, it can only be done as a protectorate of both countries. It is not a meaningful political unit, the design and the history. It has no real cohesion.

Lord Howe of Aberavon, 27 November 2001

How did the Anglo-Irish process emerge?

We were of the view that we couldn't go on as we were. The continuing terrorist problems and the continuing political turmoil created the spur. Membership of the European Community created the opportunity. However uncertain we were of making any headway, we simply had to try, and that was what kept it going thereafter.

What were your motives?

Different people had different priorities, depending on what job you were doing. Above all, we wanted to diminish or eliminate the effect of terrorism on the community, both in Northern Ireland and in the

rest of the United Kingdom. It was plain that one had to address the causes of the terrorist activity which seemed to stretch over 300 years of history. The impulse of the Irish leadership was to advance the agenda of a united Ireland. But the commitment to the Union in the 1922 Act was the other half of the equation. As so often, one was trying to reconcile two positions from miles apart. It's almost the same as in Gibraltar.

What were the conflicting motives between the Northern Ireland Office and the Foreign Office?

It was built into the situation. When, for example, Douglas Hurd succeeded Jim Prior as Northern Ireland Secretary, he was bound to be exposed to the collective anxieties of the Northern Ireland officials, and therefore almost bound to address this position and to take more account of them. They knew the tensions, they knew the pressures, they knew the anxieties that were borne in upon them from the Unionist community.

What did you think about Enoch Powell's conspiracy theory, that is, that the Foreign Office would engage in a sell-out?

I thought it was fanciful in the extreme. It was a very strange thing that somebody with Enoch's intelligence could be so driven by such a simple conviction.

What was the influence of Irish America?

The impact of Irish America was sustained, substantial, and for a long period undiminished and undiminishing. I remember going, for example, to Stanford on a visit four years ago, and being amazed and aghast by the extent to which the San Francisco Chronicle was still dominated by misconceptions on a grand scale. One was constantly required to address the problem. It was a continuing factor which we tried to address, and which we are still addressing now. The impact of September 11th on that has been substantial, but not even now sufficient to extinguish it. One must not forget that there are about ten times as many Irishmen in America as in Ireland!

Did you feel pressure from the US government?

It varied enormously on who we are talking about. I became a natural target for the simplistic yet sincere presentation of the Irish-American case, and we were, therefore, devoting a lot of time to sustained 'counter-propaganda'. The need for this often depended on the individuals involved. For example, the arrival – at a later stage – of the Kennedy cousin as US Ambassador in Dublin became a powerful disturbing factor.

Did you notice any change with regard to Irish America after the AIA?

Yes. It created an opportunity for more mature and more favourable American insight. It enabled us to raise money and investment from the American government. We were engaged in a Sysiphean struggle, which then began moving in the right way.
Did the issue of job discrimination come up in discussions with Irish Americans?

The MacBride principles were always on the agenda, and we addressed this concern.

Would you say that Northern Ireland was a burden on the conduct of British foreign policy?

I don't think it ever really stood in the way of foreign policy. I think the relationship was sufficiently mature for the US and the UK to go through their agenda and to recognise that this issue was of that quality, and the other of another quality. We were able, for example, to achieve a useful marriage of interests at the time of the Libyan bombing occasion, when we moved the Americans on the issue of extradition, but we knew we wouldn't shift the fundamental concern of the Americans.

What persuaded Thatcher to sign the Agreement?

It was the recurrent realisation that things couldn't be left as they were. It was a different application of the famous Thatcherite phrase: there is no alternative ('TINA'). We kept on addressing the agenda, and we found that to abandon the attempt to move forward - wherever that took you - would mean moving backwards.

What was your view of sovereignty?

Sovereignty is not like virginity. It is a multiple complex, and you can't keep it in boxes which are vertically divided. Interpenetration has to take place all the time, and it is taking place all the time. The European Union is the most powerful example. It has enabled us to tame nationalism without suppressing patriotism, and share sovereignty without destroying the nation. I think that was at the heart of the Anglo-Irish process, the gradual perception that one has to abandon the view that

sovereignty is an all-or-nothing thing. Margaret, I think, never fully appreciated that. She never really accepted it. And yet she used the phrase: you can't buck the market. I often use that as an example, explaining why a sovereign state cannot control its exchange rates.

Do you think the Agreement was a success?

Certainly it was. Until the Agreement, the instinct was that the two governments should shout at each other. Following the Agreement, the governments got in the habit of talking to each other. That's grown and grown ever since. Now, there's an instinctive feeling that when things go wrong, they immediately get together and decide what to do about it.

What was the contribution of the Anglo-Irish Agreement to the current peace process?

It was the provision of a pathway, of creating institutions which institutionalised the dialogue. It didn't attempt to sketch out the agenda in detail, but it created a framework in which the process was bound to be ongoing. It's part of what is necessary in any peace process, to create a framework in which confidence can grow, so that one can survive the bad days.

Do you think the British government conceded anything that it shouldn't have conceded?

I don't think so. In a sense, you can't foresee the consequences of any concession in any negotiation. To take a rather different example, the Single European Act of 1985. It is possible there to argue that we had conceded more than we had wished to concede, in terms of qualified majority voting on social issues. When that happened, we had taken a calculated risk that without making that concession we couldn't get the other crucial concessions that we needed. I can't identify any comparable episode in the Anglo-Irish process. I think that one area where I would have liked us to make concessions – and where we didn't - was on the issue of mixed courts. I believed that it could have been possible to begin designing a more integrated judicial structure. But the Lord Chancellor, Lord Hailsham, was flatly opposed to that, and Margaret Thatcher probably didn't need to consider it seriously, because Hailsham prevented the issue from being discussed anyway. I would have liked to explore that. The other regret was that the whole thing was undertaken without consultation with the Unionists. On the other hand, whether it would have been possible to consult the Unionists, and go as far as we did, is very doubtful.

Were you very surprised by the Unionist reaction?

I think I was not surprised by the fact because one knew from people like Ian Gow the intensity of the opposition. The emotional strength of it still shook me.
...

Could you identify the major sticking points during the negotiations?

Some of the points seemed curiously trivial in retrospect. For example, there was a big discussion about the location of the joint Secretariat. It attracted a lot more emotional attention than I thought it would. To some extent, I attribute that to the arrival of Tom King at the Northern Ireland Office, and the consequent impact of the officials on him.

Do you think that, during 1984 and 1985, the Anglo-Irish Agreement was a top priority for the government?

It was one of the issues that government handled more coherently, more rationally and more single-mindedly than many others. It was a remarkable example of collective Cabinet responsibility, handled through the working group of Northern Ireland and the ministers and officials. The other issue where we proceeded in a similar way was Hong Kong. They were both major preoccupying negotiations. They probably weren't the top priorities, but certainly the most important non-domestic agenda items. The European relationship and the Cold War didn't require at any point the same intensity as the Irish Question. I was extremely lucky to be one of those involved the whole way through, just like David Goodall, Lord Armstrong, and Margaret Thatcher.

Lord Howell of Guildford, 6 March 2001

Did you personally regard NI as an integral part of the United Kingdom or rather as a natural constituent of Ireland?

The former, but not quite in the way that one would regard Yorkshire or Kent as an integral part of the United Kingdom, simply because you had to cross water to get to it, and not all that many people in London knew that much about it. Also, over the previous years it had had its own government, and

while it had members of government here at Westminster, they tended to be a group apart. They voted with the Tories, but they were a group apart, so there was a degree of remoteness in the whole thing.

In your opinion, what impact did publin opinion in Great Britain have on the formulation of government policy with regard to Northern Ireland?

Not vast. You will remember that the reasons given for abolishing Stormont and putting in direct rule were that we were not in total control of the security situation. Ted Heath particularly emphasised that we were blamed in the councils of the world and by the world media for what was happening there without being in total control of what was happening. Therefore the time had come to combine the security and the political side under one political structure which was direct rule.

How would you describe the relationship between the political and security strands of your policy at that time?

Under the guidance of the new Secretary of State, they became extremely close. From the very beginning, we operated at Stormont castle in constant liaison with Sir Harry Tuzo, the GOC, and Sir Robert Ford, the Commander Land Forces, and of course with the head of the RUC and with the civil service, who were extremely supportive, and with all those in the various political communities who would talk to us.

Operation Motorman – it 'had to be done' because of the benefits in terms of security, or as a matter of principle, affirming British sovereignty in every part of HM's jurisdiction?

Very much the latter. Slightly contradicting what I said earlier, but at that time, public opinion had been engaged, certainly at the tabloid level, how unthinkable it was that there were No-Go-areas: this is the United Kingdom – it is completely untolerable that there should be No-Go-areas. It had to cease to be.

Was that your personal view as well?

Yes, it was. We simply couldn't tolerate it.

Some authors argue that in the first four months of direct rule you were too soft on the IRA, and you had underestimated the degree to which the abolition of Stormont would fuel Protestant uncertainty. Would you agree with that view?

I would agree with parts, and disagree with other parts. I think the government deliberately leant towards the Catholic community on the grounds that – in the view of Willie Whitelaw and Ted Heath – the Unionists had brought it on themselves. The unfair part, of course, was that the latter-day Unionist governments had gone on the reform path, particularly under Terence O'Neill and Brian Faulkner. Nevertheless, the general feeling was that it was too late, the whole thing was entrenched, and there was much too much discrimination. Willie Whitelaw was definitely going in the direction of listening with a very much more sympathetic ear to the Catholic complaints and fears; he was seeing them and contacting them. I think that obviously gave that impression – not only to the hardline people who would never speak to us anyway, but also to the moderate Unionists – that we were leaning too much the Catholic way. That was allright as long as it didn't mean condoning violence, or the IRA. There was a twin-track. On the one hand, we were nice to the Catholics who had had a rough time, but on the other hand we were as tough as possible against the men of violence, on both sides.

What were the issues when you chaired the sub-committee on social and economic affairs at the Castle talks in late-1973?

I think it was employment, infrastructure and investment, social and housing conditions. I am quite sure that we talked a lot about employment.

How would you describe London's approach in relation to social and economic affairs?

Positive, but maybe a bit naive. The view that Ted Heath gave to me when he appointed me was that if we went into Ireland and organised effectively social improvement, new housing estates, new roads, new transport, clearances of slum areas, and brought in new jobs, attracted new industry from all over Europe and elsewhere, we would uplift the general social structure and living standards, and this would have some immediate meliorating effect on the violence. That was the theory. Of course it proved to be completely ironeous. But there was a very strong commitment because it was believed by the British government that this was part of the solution.

Was inequality between the two communities an issue?

That was definitely an issue, and people from the SDLP were always on about it that there was unfair discrimination.

Was there a reluctance on behalf of the British government to tackle this issue because it could compromise its position as an honest broker or because it would increase uncertainty?

It was recognised that it could do all those things if it was improperly handled. The whole of British government policy was a tightrope, and it changed from week to week, it changed through time and space. One week it could be that we had to do something to shore up Protestant confidence, and the next week it could be that we felt we had to plunge ahead with anti-discrimination measures, which we knew would cause offence on the other side. You lived with the fact that you would always going to offend somebody. It was very much a pragmatic approach.

What was, in your view, the natural role for the Irish government in the affairs of Northern Ireland? Was there a role for them?

Certainly a very practical co-operative role. You must not forget that under the reforming O'Neill government, there were all sorts of very close contacts between Dublin and Belfast: railways, joint sports councils, waterways – a whole range of Quangos which were being encouraged, and civil servants were often going down to Dublin. There was all sort of practical integration going on, and we thought that was an utterly sensible idea. Indeed we had a view that in the context of the European Community the differences between the UK and the Republic would blur and calm down, and the border problems would ease. This was a general view which wasn't very well thought out and turned out to be quite wrong again.
There was a great deal of contact, but after we arrived the contact froze because the Dublin government became less and less helpful with the arrival of direct rule, which, I suppose, they saw as a step away from where they thought they were going. I never went to Dublin in my two and a half years as Minister, and indeed was not encouraged or even allowed to go.

Rees has argued that if the government had tried harder to include the Loyalists at Sunningdale, it wouldn't have become as big a threat to Protestants as it turned out. Do you agree?

Very hard to say. The Paisleyites were actually outside the gates of Sunningdale and shouting: that the whole Irish dimension was a farce and unthinkable. It was probably not determined by the White Paper or the language of the Irish dimension but by the general mood prevailing at the time. The fact that Whitelaw had met the IRA probably drew many people several notches to the hostile and gave Paisley more recruits and made people more determined to have nothing to do with the British. The sell-out mentality was always something we had to shoot down because it was not true. I doubt whether they would have ever come into the Sunningdale system. We tried extremely hard.

Was full integration an option?

We used to discuss it at the political level whether that was possible. I suppose in a way it was, except – in a twist of Northern Irish politics – the extreme Loyalists didn't want it because they didn't trust us not to sell them out. So there was a lot of mistrust.
I don't think it was a very popular idea. On the contrary, the most popular idea, which we had to resist, was: why don't we just tell them to do their own thing, we are fed up with all these Irish. We had to say: that's not the way, it is part of the United Kingdom, they are our kith and kin, they fought with us in the wars, we have got to stay under one form or another.

Why devolution – because people in NI wanted it, or as a means to keep NI on distance?

It was the preferred solution because the senior moderate Unionists, and increasingly the SDLP and the Alliance party, wanted devolved government. They wanted to go back to their government.

From your point of view, it was the best solution as well?

If we could get it back there, and if we could ensure that it would not get out of control again, yes.

In your judgement, why did Sunningdale fail?

I have no doubt at all: it was change of government, and some things that were rumoured in Protestant circles that Harold Wilson had said: that there was a sell-out about to happen under a new Labour government. In a rumour-filled environment, if people like Willie Whitelaw and Francis Pym were suspected of a sell-out, these people were ten times more suspect, and that was enough to create a febrile atmosphere. Those were the underlying reasons, and of course the actual trigger of the whole thing was the strike by the Protestants which paralysed the whole province. Their demand became to pull down the power-sharing arrangements.

So, constitutional certainty was important?

Absolutely crucial. We repeated those things during our government like a mantra: that NI's constitution could only change by majority vote, and indeed we had a referendum. We said ten times a day they would remain a part of the UK as long as they wanted to.

Do you think the Good Friday Agreement is in the tradition of the 1974 structures?

I think the Good Friday Agreement contains some of the same faults, although Sunningdale did not bring in Sinn Fein. I always thought, and so did Willie Whitelaw, that we could be tougher still with Dublin on the IRA. Increasingly, through our intelligence work we knew where they were; we knew how they operated; we knew where they were in the Republic. We were pressing the Gardai and the Irish Army to be more co-operative because they were extremely uncooperative to start with, but there were people in the political world in Dublin who were beginning to understand that we had a common task, and that the whole thing could be a threat to the Republic of Ireland if it got out of control. All that was going on, but we weren't nearly tough enough taking these people out, tracking them down, stopping the money to come from America.
This time, it is the same. You can go a long way on political reconciliation and leaning backwards to end discrimination, and bring in even the peaceful wing of Sinn Fein – but once you allow the violence method any kind of acknowledgement or respectability at all, you're going to send shivers through the whole system and drive the Protestants back out again. I think Good Friday has made mistakes. I think the early release of convicted people is a great mistake, and it has got the seeds of the same mistakes we made with Sunningdale. We did not combine compromise and conciliation with an iron fist against the killers, and they are doing it again

Lord Hurd, 4 December 2001

What were the aims of the British government in the emerging Anglo-Irish process?

There were several motives. One – which was very strong in the mind of the Prime Minister –was that we needed to have more effective security co-operation from the Republic, and the Gardai in particular. It existed, but it was not entirely satisfactory...

To me, it seemed good to explore the basic situation with the Republic, and see if you could make some progress. There was a limit, however, to what we could agree. Giving the Republic a voice in the internal matters of the province did not struck me as a problem, because they already had it. If there was some event on the border – if something happened in Armagh or Fermanagh – the Irish Foreign Minister, Peter Barry, used to phone me anyway. He didn't need a treaty to do that – he was doing it. There was no way in which I would say: Peter, put the phone down, you don't have any right to discuss that. In a way, what we conceded was something they already had. What we did not concede was shared sovereignty, shared decision-taking.

Therefore, provided what the Republic asked was not excessive, it was worth having an agreement. That was the Prime Minister's view in the end. The Foreign Office, on the other hand, had a somewhat more ambitious programme. They would have liked to go further. As a result, we had some lively discussions within the government about how far we could go.

Was there a conflict between Northern Ireland Office and Foreign Office?

I don't think it was a conflict. There was a difference of perspective. I was very conscious of the limit beyond which we could not press the Unionists, and beyond which I did not want to go myself, whereas I think the Foreign Office would have liked to go further to meet the original Irish request of shared sovereignty. There was a difference, but Geoffrey Howe and I were working very closely. It never became a bitter argument.

Would you say that the Anglo-Irish Agreement was a solution in itself, or was it a framework for a solution?

It was a framework, a step. It became clouded and repulsive to the Unionists – partly because they didn't understand it, but also on a question of procedure. They said that they should have been involved, and indeed, this was a major difficulty. The Irish were absolutely clear that the negotiations must be confidential, and the Unionists consistently criticised the Agreement on the grounds that they were kept in the dark.

I tried once. I had the Prime Minister's permission to tell Molyneaux and Powell as Privy Councillors, and I did offer them information about the negotiations. Powell refused, so I never gave them that information.

On the substance of the Agreement, it was a crucial step for the Unionists. For the first time, Fine Gael accepted the principle of consent, and they no longer believed that the unity of Ireland was the overriding principle. After that, Fianna Fail did too, the British Labour Party and the Americans did. Everybody now does, but by the time, it was not accepted. It was a big step forward. It did gradually produce better security co-operation, though the Prime Minister was always disappointed on that.

Was your government still committed to devolution?

Yes, as a long term aim, and there wasn't a contradiction. We always resisted what Powell pressed so hard, which was total integration... The Unionists themselves were very ambivalent about total integration anyway.

FitzGerald claims that you gave up on the idea of changing Articles 2 and 3 of the Irish Constitution, that you even discouraged him from embarking on such a venture. Is that correct?

It is correct. I never thought – and that was a difference with the Foreign Office – that it was a price worth paying for. I don't think, as a Secretary of State, I could have delivered joint sovereignty. And, therefore, a bargain which gave them joint sovereignty (which was a huge concession and which might have suffered the same fate as the Sunningdale Agreement) in return for a change of the Constitution was not worthwhile. I didn't think it was a jewel worth paying a big price for.

What did you think about ideas like mixed courts and mixed police forces. Was there ever a possibility this would become reality?

No. I didn't think it was a possibility. I think my successors couldn't have conceded more to the Irish without a real explosion. Paisley could have made quite a mess of the place, and most Unionists would have agreed with him. They would have been outraged. What you were describing would have been expressions of joint sovereignty, but with no consent.

What was the influence of Irish America?

There was not any real influence. There was no pressure on us. It wasn't a consideration in Margaret Thatcher's mind.

Were you surprised by the Unionist reaction?

I was disappointed that it was that strong because I really thought they had made a big gain. It was not joint authority, and the Irish had accepted consent. The Unionists never saw it, though, largely because of the way it had been negotiated. Whether we should have said to Dublin: 'look, we have to keep the Unionists informed' – the negotiations might well have sunk, but I am not sure about that. We had a similar argument in Hong Kong. The main reason why the Chinese government got so angry with us was that we, Chris Patten and I, insisted that Patten's plans should be discussed in Hong Kong publicly. Now, we have a similar situation in Gibraltar: two flags, three speakers. I don't think it would have worked with the Unionists. I think they would have tried to destroy the discussions, rather than to take part in them. But I often wonder whether we should have played it that way tactically, because it was the procedure that had created the strong Unionist reaction.

Was the Anglo-Irish Agreement an incentive for the Unionists to agree to devolution and power-sharing?

No, I don't think that was in our minds. Devolution was a separate question. The two things were not embilically linked.

What was your view of Sinn Fein at that point? Was there any possibility of getting them involved in the political process?

No, I didn't see such a possibility. Sinn Fein wasn't really in our minds. They existed, there were councillors. I refused to see them, and I was criticised for that. To me, they were of no huge political importance at that stage. What was important was the Provisional IRA, and they were just an enemy. It was a straightforward position. Much later, this changed, in particular when we received the message from the IRA that they thought that the war was over. We didn't see, then, by purely military means, how we could bring peace to Northern Ireland. It was a deadlock. We couldn't destroy them, they couldn't destroy us. We did decide, therefore, to explore the possibilities.

The Irish argued that the Anglo-Irish Agreement was supposed to stop the growth of Sinn Fein. Was that a consideration on the British side too?

We hoped it would be a consequence. I had long talks with Hume and with Catholic churchmen. It was a motive, but it was a secondary motive to build up the SDLP as an official spokesman of the minority.

What did you think about the supergrasses?

It didn't particularly trouble me. When I was there, it wasn't a huge time for terrorist attacks. One always had the feeling that the Army and RUC were expected to play by rules which the IRA would have never dreamt about. They were always open to criticism, and the supergrasses were one example. We had to cope with that, and we had to make concessions. But I didn't feel it was my job to bind them, to restrain the forces of the state beyond a certain point, which was to keep to the law. I was sympathetic to Jack Hermon, who was the Chief Constable.

Do you agree that upholding the rule of law was one of the main reasons for the British government's presence in Northern Ireland?

The reason for the presence was entirely historical. One of the very remarkable things about this whole period is that 'the dog didn't bark'. I would have expected, during this long period of troubles, there would have been a strong force on this side of the Channel that would just say: why the hell are we here? Every public opinion poll showed that people didn't want us to stay in Northern Ireland, but here we stayed. This force never really established itself, even though we were losing soldiers and spending a lot of money, and getting very little gratitude from any of the politicians in Northern Ireland. I think it was because of this underlying feeling that history had dealt us these cards. It was our responsibility. Of course, there were all kinds of other arguments. If we had left Northern Ireland, terrorism would have spread to Glasgow and Liverpool. I never thought that these were really important arguments. The real argument was that we had to accept the responsibility. The Prime Minister was a classic case. She had no real affection for Northern Ireland. I sometimes described her as an anti-Unionist Unionist. She was a Unionist because she was for the Union and we had a responsibility here, but she didn't like the Unionists. We had no military or economic interest, but we certainly had a political responsibility. That's what it felt like.

...

Do you think there was any scope to toughen security measures?

Internment had been tried. It created resentment. I insisted on keeping it on the statute book, though, and I refused the Irish suggestion to the contrary. It seemed to me that if there was some huge crisis, one might need it again. That was the only circumstance, and it didn't happen.

The Unionists also wanted hot pursuit into the Republic. That was not real... Shoot-to-kill – you can't institutionalise shoot-to-kill. You see constantly what happens when you institutionalise shoot-to-kill – on the West Bank, for example. You can't make too many rules about what is to happen in the heat of an engagement, but to institutionalise shoot-to-kill – no. I think the security forces had a reasonable leeway, but not too much.

Do you think the security forces were a law unto themselves?

No, I don't think so. I felt I knew as much as I needed to know about operations, and I felt I was reasonably in the confidence of the GOC and the Chief Constable. There was an endless argument about the intelligence services, and what their relationship should be with the Army and the RUC.

...

The relationship doesn't work too badly. You expect your Chief Constable to let you know of impending trouble. But he doesn't want you, and you don't want to interfere with operational decisions. It was a workable system which had its advantages.

Adam Ingram MP, 4 March 2002

What difference did the change in government in 1997 make?

Quite clearly, we came with a new agenda, there was an excitement around because of the new government. The key ingredient was Mo, who had a very clear and good knowledge, having worked in the Shadow team, and who knew a lot of the players on all sides of the divide. There was also a tremendous mood for change in Northern Ireland. People wanted the logjam to be broken, despite the entrenched attitudes in the political leaderships. I always used the phrase: if we could only sack the politicians and elect the people, we could move forward a lot more rapidly. There was a willingness to give. That was the dynamic of the situation.

I was left to deal with the bits of the process that were not healthy. There was still a lot of violence. Two police officers had been shot by the IRA. The IRA was still planting bombs: Markethill, Moira. So, even though there was an increasing political engagement, the military wing of the Republican movement was still very active. It was part of their tactics: to act as if the only thing that the Brits understood was violence. It's a mood that was prevalent within Republicanism, and it is still there today.

Do you think your vast majority in the House of Commons gave you the freedom to take risks?

Oh yes, we were prisoners to no one. If we were to do something, we didn't have to look over our shoulders. The Tories were dependent on the Unionists; the Major government couldn't move too far because they would have lost the majority. We had none of those problems, we had a clean slate, we had a clear direction, and we didn't have to worry about the numbers in the House of Commons. That didn't mean we were dictatorial, or that we were moving it forward without thought. The only way to move it forward was to engage with everyone. But there was that certainty that we were free to take the big risks we needed to take: on prisoners, police reform, taking internment of the statute book, etc.

All of that was, in some sense, to destabilise the Unionists. They were seeing that we were not going to be deflected, that we were pretty determined. They also detected that there was a groundswell amongst the wider population to get on with it. The wider public wanted the monkey off the back, and we were the vehicle by which that would be achieved.

Did you see it as your task to reassure the Unionists?

Everyone got a share of the confidence-building measures. Usually, if you were doing something on one side of the equation, you had to have something in the pipeline that tried to balance it.

We put in place a study to examine the issue of victimhood in Northern Ireland. No government had done anything for victims. It was seen as doing something not only for the majority of victims, from the Unionist community, but also for victims from the Nationalist community. Although it was there as a big overall confidence building measure, it was becoming politicised on both sides of the divide.

There is an argument according to which the British government would reassure and push the Unionists whilst the Irish would do the same for the Nationalists.

There was only a bit of that, for the simple reason that that would be the traditional territory in which the governments would sit. Tony Blair, for example, made a major visit to Northern Ireland within a few weeks of being elected. He went to a natural Unionist event, an agricultural show. And he gave assurances about the way forward, which was judged to address Unionist sensitivities.

On the other hand, the Republic of Ireland government was engaging with the Nationalist community. The Nationalists were in the bag for them, but they were concerned, in particular, with the Republican community.

Those were tentative strategies because the two governments were suspicious of the communities they were addressing. The Irish government still had to deal with the problems of militant Republicanism, and there were exceptionally fraught relationships between the British government and the Unionists. We were eventually seen as simply appeasing Republicans, as selling out. We could not win.

No matter what we stacked up on the Unionist side, they would always point to something else. The minute you made a move towards them – and that was true of all the sides – they back-pocketed it, and said: give me something else. You never got a reward. Republicans were the best at that. They kept pushing and pushing, and they also had the support of Irish America and the President.

How was the co-operation between the British and Irish governments?

It became increasingly good. It wasn't bad when we came in. We were all new people to each other in terms of being in power. It was increasingly marked by the relationship between Tony Blair and Bertie Ahern. It was a very close and symbiotic relationship. That does not mean that everything was agreed, but if there was a difference of approach, it was resolvable. The same was true for contacts on ministerial level.

Violence was going on. Where would the British government have drawn line and excluded the Republicans from the process?

We came close to it on a number of occasions. In 1999, there was a series of events when the IRA had stepped over the line. We had enough information to show who was handling all of this. We were always saying that Sinn Fein and the IRA were inextricably linked. And indeed, all the violence that was being done was sanctioned at the top level of Sinn Fein and the IRA. It became a very fragile period. Mo took the judgment call that we would not put them out of the process. It was a very fine judgment for her to make, and it was similar to the time when she went to the Maze to meet the Loyalist prisoners. It could have gone right off the rails. But it was the right decision to make, because it kept the process going. We had to swallow hard on an awful lot of occasions, but you have to do that when you are dealing with a terrorist organisation.

Sinn Fein always talks about the so-called securocrats. Did you encounter conservatism amongst the security forces, reluctance to change?

I would have been a securocrat, like the Chief Constable, the GOC, and all the top officials who reported to me. There was a very clear knowledge base of what the threats posed to Northern Ireland were. We knew what the potential threats were, the actual threats, and the implications of any change of posture. There were some points of intense debates between the politicos – those that were in charge of the political development – and those that were in charge of the security development. The politicos were only moving forward, the security people were concerned with the present. I knew there was a lot of unease, I knew there were points of resistance when it came to the people within the RUC or the Army.

At the top level, though, there was a willingness to embrace change. I make this point very strongly, and very sincerely. The senior people in the civil service, and the senior people in the RUC, all came from Northern Ireland. They wanted a future. All of them were products of the troubles, all of them wanted their children, grandchildren and future generations not to have the same problems. They were drivers of change while also having to deal with a language of caution. The real heroes in all of this are those people who were identified and vilified as securocrats. They were the great motor for change. The fact that we moved forward wasn't because of pressure from outside – it was because the machine itself wanted to move forward. That's why when Sinn Fein uses the term securocrats, they were simply wrong.

What about decommissioning? Was that seen as a political or a security issue?

It was both. It had to be delivered by political determination, by those who had their hands on the weapons, that is, primarily Sinn Fein.

Do you think they could deliver it?

I always took the view that they would deliver, but that they would deliver when it suited them best, that is, when they could get maximum advantage out of it. We were having to manage a huge programme of change, and so did they. People who hated the Brits needed to be convinced that there was a political approach to this. The political leadership, all of whom had come up through the roots of the military wing of their organisation, was very committed to a political way forward. That didn't mean that they wouldn't go back to violence, but they were committed to a political way forward, so we had to create the conditions to keep that momentum going. Inevitably, it meant that they had to face up to the toughest question they would ever have to face, and that was decommissioning. In a sense, it had to be a time of their choosing, no matter how much we pushed them. On the other hand, if it had become longer and longer, then the elastic would have snapped. The people would have asked: are you guys for real?

So, it was more a political test rather than a security necessity?

It wasn't a security necessity. From a security perspective, our state of alertness always had to be conditioned by their capability. They had the capability to do a lot of very nasty things. But: what was their intent? We had to watch their capability and their intent all the time.

Was it the British government's aim to strengthen Adams?

I wouldn't have put it that way. But there was a definite political drive within their movement, led by Adams and McGuinness and Doherty. All of them had been senior players within violent Republicanism. They would have returned to violence if they thought that that had been a way to achieve their objective.

The first debate which we had in government was whether to shake the hand of Gerry Adams. This was shaking the hand of someone who we knew a lot about. The Prime Minister made the judgment to do it, so everyone else eventually did it. I don't think they quite understood what big a step that was for someone like me who is totally opposed to use violence to achieve the political end which they were trying to achieve. If it moved the way forward, what is my prejudice?

What was your view of Drumcree vis-à-vis the Republican leadership? Was it orchestrated?

No question it was. The whole question of Drumcree was an orchestrated event, but also genuinely supported by the community in that area. Sinn Fein were not wholly in control of this, but if it was ever going to change direction, away from what they wanted, they would have taken control, and people in the leadership would have been replaced. One must not forget, the IRA is a very violent organisation against its own people. And if people frustrate their objectives, they don't hesitate to take them out, damage them, or throw them out of their own country. There was orchestration in the sense that there was something that they could use and exploit, but they were not in day to day management of it. On

the other side of the equation was the Orange Order who were the most inflexible organisation, who just couldn't see a way to move forward. Although there were times when they were prepared to move, everytime they moved, a brick wall would be built on the other side. If one side was seen to move in part, the other side would say that they don't believe it.

It was a situation in which the British government could only lose?

We could only deal with it on the basis of a security response. We tried everything in terms of seeking a political solution to it. The minute one side was thinking that this was going a bit faster than they were prepared to move, they became obdurate. Increasingly, the violence associated with it was declining as well. Both sides knew that our security response was going to be very focused, and we would not allow either side to dominate what was happening in civic society. The security response was a way in which we made that manifest. We could not allow a subset of the state to dictate the state what was going to happen to their fellow citizens.

Do you think the previous government made any mistakes regarding Drumcree?

In 1997, it was Ronnie Flanagan who decided what to do, even though he could have been overruled by the Secretary of State. That would have caused huge issues, that is, for a politician to say to a security chief: we want your people to go in a different direction. There is a subtlety in all of that in the British state which is hard to fully explain, but there has to be that relationship of understanding and mutual respect. At the end of the day, though, if the government so wishes it, the government must be obeyed.

In 1997, Flanagan said that it was about choosing the lesser of two evils. We were faced with the prospect of Loyalist rioting and Loyalist violence of a sectarian nature, and on the other side Republican violence and Republican unrest. The judgment call was to be short, sharp and effective: to take that walk down and get it out the way, and to deal with the spill over effect, because that could be contained. The other side was going to be more dramatic: more shooting, more killing.

We had all that information. The intelligence information we had was never perfect, but it was very, very good. Sometimes, it was as close to perfect as it can be. We always worked from the basis of a high state of knowledge which no one else had. We never explained it other than to say that this is based on our best judgment, and the best intelligence advice available.

It was a very close call in 1997. In the subsequent years, the level of determination was beginning to decline on the part of Orangeism. Some of the Loyalist groups were starting to argue that they wouldn't want to be associated with this type of "in your face" approach towards the Nationalist community. There was a divided approach in Unionism/Loyalism. That was the dynamic of the situation, and it helped. Also, Unionism would instinctively respect the state, simply because they were the state for so long. Once the decision was made by the security forces and government, it caused problems within their ranks. We then had a very considered security response. It was very heavy, very signficiant. We were saying: we will not let you dominate.

We put in place a mechanism – the Parades commission – to put forward their arguments. They would not engage with the Parades commission, but they thought that that was a sop to Republicanism, but it was never designed as that. It was designed to take on board some of their issues.

Lord King, 27 November 2001

Was there still a possibility to influence the negotiations for the Anglo-Irish Agreement when you were made Northern Ireland Secretary?

Yes. The general outline was pretty clear, but there were some changes that we made. The negotiations were conducted without the knowledge of any of the parties in Northern Ireland, in particular the Unionist side. There had been a deliberate attempt to exclude the local parties, feeling that this had to be conducted in an extremely tight, secure way. And there had been a worry that if it had been more widely spread, it might have put too much pressure on individuals, and that they might not have remained secure.
There were sensitive points. One of them was, for example, that the Joint Secretariat should be at Stormont. I felt that that would have given the wrong signal. Also, I wasn't happy about the exclusion of people in Northern Ireland, even in the Northern Ireland civil service. Sir Kenneth Bloomfield, for example, was someone whose advice and wisdom was missing from the planning of the Agreement.

Were you surprised about the strength of Unionist opposition?

The extent of Unionist opposition was a surprise. It could have gone either way. If there had been a more imaginative approach on the Unionist side, it could have been handled on the basis that the Anglo-Irish Agreement established – for the first time – the legitimacy of partition, the legitimacy of Northern Ireland as part of the United Kingdom, and its acceptance by the Irish government. I always wondered what would have happened if the Unionist leaders had come out and said: we won. Gradually, we got them to understand more clearly that there were benefits for the Unionists, and it took some time for them to recognise that we were not selling out Northern Ireland. We were trying to establish a more constructive way forward, which tried to recognise the legitimate interests of Nationalists and Unionists. That balance has been carried forward, and it started a continuous process that led to the Downing Street Declaration in 1993 and the current peace process.

The new situation had to be adressed – not only by Unionists and Nationalists, but also by the Republicans for whom it was increasingly difficult to justify a campaign of terror. Some of their arguments had been destroyed, in particular the argument that we had a strategic interest in Northern Ireland which would override the democratic wishes of the population...

After the Agreement, what was your plan to get the Unionists involved again?

This was a difficult challenge. We tried to get a better understanding of the Agreement while the boycott was going on. The boycott stayed until 1987, fairly strongly, but after that it gradually withered away. The general attitude of non-politicians was more constructive. A lot of politicians in the history of Northern Ireland are driven into corners and can't get out of the positions they adopted.

We worked a lot in the economic field, trying to encourage prosperity. We achieved a great reduction in the unemployment levels. We took a third off the unemployment, and created a much better atmosphere. A lot of those issues were more important to people than the more abstract political questions.

Also, we made clear that we would listen to any points the Irish would made, but that we would retain the responsibility for decisions, in particular in the area of security where there were widespread rumours. There was no question of joint authority.

There was a lot of anxiety in the early stages, but in the end, people became more assured. People didn't feel that there were a lot of secret things happening behind closed doors, partly because we gave fuller accounts of what was going on. I think we rebuilt a measure of confidence, and by the end, we had pretty good relations with both the Nationalists and the Unionists on a personal basis and in the House of Commons, even though they sometimes kept the rhetoric going.

Was there a noticeable difference in security co-operation?

We didn't get the scale of improvement that Downing Street was looking for. We did get better co-operation with the Gardai, but there were events which caused a lot of damage to the relationship. For example, there was a young chap going to a GAA football match who was shot by a soldier on a watchtower. It proved to be an accident. That ran into an absolute storm of immediate belief that this was a murderous attack. It put a lot of pressure on the Irish government: they felt that they had to be seen to be imposing a position on the Anglo-Irish Conference.

What we found, on the security side, was that the Gardai were very sensitive to the political mood on the more senior official level, the appointments to which have to be approved by the Cabinet. This does introduce some pressure on senior officers to make sure that their actions are politically correct. At the lower level, we found that they had a very constructive and effective co-operation with their opposite numbers in the RUC. The difficulty was how far the senior officers felt able to go in terms of co-operation, but the Agreement certainly improved the situation, and it laid the ground for further improvements. The problem was that there was a lot of sympathy for a united Ireland in the Republic of Ireland, and even though they might disapprove of the IRA's methods, some of them sympathised with what they believed in.

What about Stalker?

That was something that had happened before I became Secretary of State, and that lingered on for a long time. There was the original inquiry, the Stalker inquiry, and then his removal. It was a difficult time. It was very unfortunate and very difficult. It gave rise to all sorts of suspicions.

You don't think there was a conspiracy?

I don't think so.

Did you think that you knew enough about what the RUC was doing?

You don't want politicians to be in control of the RUC or the Special Branch. It is a difficult balance. Inevitably, if you are working in the intelligence field, politicans are to some extent excluded. The Prime Minister doesn't know what the SAS do, the Home Secretary doesn't necessarily know every action of MI5. They have to work on a need-to-know basis. You need to set the rules. You need to have confidence in your senior officers. We used to have regular discussions with the Chief Constables and the GOC. One kept in touch as much as one could, knowing that you could never know the whole picture. It is indeed a difficult balance to strike.

You have to take responsibility without having full control.

Indeed, you have to take responsibility. That's why you have your advisers, who are independent, and it is their job to be as fully briefed as you can be. The rules have to be followed, and they are quite clear. They are laid down by the Attorney General, in the Yellow Card, and through the Director of Public Prosecutions. Also, there was a pretty lively complaints system.

Was the Fair Employment Bill a result of American pressure?

There is no question that the Americans were keen on it. There were pressures through the American companies in Northern Ireland, the MacBride principles. The principles were fair, and Northern Ireland was going nowhere if it allowed rampant discrimination. It was a coming together. I think we did it pretty well.

What was the influence of Irish America?

There was an interest among politicians in America. I went to Congress, and I used to talk to the Four Hoursemen and others. Also, there was a fairly continuous stream of American visitors. One must not forget that whilst there were four million Irish, there were 40 million Irish Americans, and they regarded themselves as more Irish than the Irish. Irish America was, therefore, a powerful political lobby, in particular in Massachusetts and New York. My interest was to ensure that their influence was productive, not destructive. There was this great temptation for them to give in to the Republican arguments. As a result, we conducted a continuous effort to try and get across the British case, backed up by myself and others who were visiting the United States.

What was your attitude towards Sinn Fein?

My time coincided with some pretty nasty terrorist incidents. There were shootings of soldiers, Enniskillen, and the sequence of events in 1988, with Gibraltar, Michael Stone, and then the killings of the corporals. That was a very distressing and difficult time. There were new threats of violence, and of course, there was the discovery of the Eksund.

In terms of our relationships to Sinn Fein/IRA, we didn't have any. It was just towards the end of my time that we got the first signs that they had second thoughts about the Anglo-Irish Agreement. We had made it clear that this wasn't the prelude to a British withdrawal, that we were entirely robust on the security field, and that Article 1 meant what it said about continuing to be part of the UK if that was what the population wanted. That, I think, sparked some reaction on the part of some members of the IRA. John Hume and others played an important role in telling them that there was no point in violence, and that it is a matter of democracy, a matter whether Irishmen can persuade other Irishmen, and if they could, that the goal would be achieved. I think that that had some force. John Hume then launched into opening up those discussion, and I knew about them. I didn't know the details, but I knew that he was talking to them. At that time, the first queries started to come through as to what our position really meant, and I was under no doubt that Father Reid and the Clonard were involved in talks with the IRA. Also, there were intelligence people manoeuvring around at the margins.

There were good political reasons as to why it made sense. The Anglo-Irish Agreement was supported by the Irish government. Of course, FitzGerald had concluded it, but then, Brian Lenihan became very committed to it, and Charles Haughey (when he became Taoiseach) supported it as well. In that sense, the Republicans were losing sympathy in Ireland, they were losing sympathy in America as well. The SDLP did extremely well. They started in 1985 with one MP in the House of Commons, and they ended up with four. The SDLP had gained from it, and the Republicans saw that violence wasn't helping, and that it wasn't enhancing their electoral chances. Violence had become a handicap.

Lord Lyell, 08 November 2001

When did you first learn that there were efforts to create a formal Anglo-Irish framework?

Certainly, we were aware from the autumn of 1984 that work was being done on some aspects of seeing how one could improve the relationship between the government in Dublin and our own over

many aspects, not just politics in Northern Ireland. In September 1985, there was a Cabinet reshuffle. Douglas Hurd went to the Home Office, and Tom King came in. We were aware that there were meetings going on, and there were papers at a reasonably high level, and that Mrs Thatcher and Mr Fitzgerald were looking for some more formal way of improving the relationship between the two governments.
I don't think it was seen as something as definite as the Good Friday Agreement, and there were rumours shaking up at the end of October, but the effect in Northern Ireland was like an earthquake. I have rarely seen such enormous indignation and anger and grievance. There was a real sense of upset and hurt amongst a lot of reasonable people. I recall saying to some of them that I felt it unreasonable that Unionists in Northern Ireland should dictate to the government in Westminster how we should conduct any aspect of foreign policy. Sure, foreign policy with the sovereign government in Dublin is different, especially with what is going on in Northern Ireland. There was this continuous campaign of terrorism, and the Unionists did feel that we had let them down.
Michael Ancram told me that the one error that we made was not to bring the Unionists on side. I think he is right. Possibly, we could have brought them on side. But the entire government apparatus in Northern Ireland is full of leaks, so it would have been very, very difficult. You cannot keep things discreet.

What did you think about the Agreeement? Was it a derogation of sovereignty, or were the Unionists making too much of a fuss?

You got it right. I thought they were making too much of a fuss. Forgive me, i don't live there. I hadn't have that threat. Between 1968 and 1985, there had been great progress with people here, and politicians and industry actually concentrating on Northern Ireland, and things went much better, even though some things perhaps didn't go so well.
When I first saw the final version of the agreement, about 36 hours before the signing, I sat with Brian Mawhinney who is from Northern Ireland. When i looked at it, i didn't think that it was derogation from sovereignty, and i didn't think that the Ulster Unionists would see it that way either. As an accountant, I always ask: who is paying the bill? There is no question that an enormous amount of English taxpayers' money is going into Northern Ireland, and from that point of view – can i say it politely – they deserved it.

Was the government surprised by the reaction?

All the members of the Conservative government, and 90 per cent of Conservative MPs, were startled. People were very surprised, and there was a lot of dismissiveness here. they were saying: the Union Jack is there, they get these subsidies. What are they upset about?
...

Was the AIA a concession to Dublin?

It perhaps was seen as a concession to Dublin. I told all my Unionist friends: Northern Ireland is part of the United Kingdom, the Union Jack flies. Leave it to the Foreign Office how to conduct foreign relations between the United Kingdom and other states. We appreciated all the time that there is the difficulty between the North and the South, but I certainly did not see that as a concession, or as a slippery slope. Sure, things went on after that, and things moved a good bit. If you take fair employment legislation, for example, I felt that that was simply a matter of bringing Northern Ireland into the 20th century.

How did you perceive the security situation?

I perceived the securituy situation as much better than in the 1970s. but there was the continual game of the Republicans who were getting cleverer and cleverer, and the security forces. much of it was really hideous.
...

How did you see the RUC? As a state within a state? As a law unto themselves?

Yes. I didn't get involved to that extent, but of course they would keep information to themselves. Of course, they would work on a 'need to know' basis. The RUC were taking dreadful losses. That is why they have this tremendous *esprit de corps*. They would not think much of me as an incomer. In that sense, it was inevitable. Still, I don't think it would have been any different with any police force in the rest of the United Kingdom, if they had been faced with what the RUC was faced with. By and large, I think the RUC desperately wanted to do ordinary policing.

Did you feel any influence from Irish America?

It could be felt all the time, and apart from some hotheads, there was enormous goodwill.

Did Irish America influence the formulation of government policy?

I am sure it went into the mix. I don't think it was a very important element of the mix. There were tremendous efforts made by our embassy in Washington to put our case to people like Ted Kennedy, and I think it has been enormously successful. The legislators in Boston and Irish American now appreciate that we are not all baddies. What they say in public might be different. Overall, I think Irish American aspects would be a part, but not a major part of policy formulation. If you didn't consider what was happening, however, it could be a problem.

Sir Christopher Mallaby, 15 November 2001

What was your role in the Anglo-Irish process?

At the beginning of 1985, I came back from Bonn and spent three years in the Cabinet Office. I was concerned with the Anglo-Irish negotiations from the moment I reached my new job in London, in particular the negotiation of the Anglo-Irish Agreement. I was doing that as a full-time job until the signature on 15 November 1985. After that, I continued to be involved in Northern Ireland affairs, but at that stage, it was only about a quarter of my work. The role I had was the technician of negotiation, the professional negotiator, the co-ordinator of British involvement. There was a team led by Robert Armstrong, with Robert Andrew and David Goodall. I was the organiser and co-ordinator and drafter of the words, and I suggested to the Prime Minister how we should play each issue when it came up.

What were you told to achieve in this process?

I think it was that we were to establish whether it was possible to have an agreement with the Irish Republic which would facilitate the United Kingdom's handling of the Northern Ireland issue without making unacceptable changes, notably without any direct Irish Republic involvement in running the affairs of Northern Ireland. The first question was: can we achieve a better relationship between London and Dublin – concerning Northern Ireland but also generally. The second question was: is it possible to have some way in which the interests of the Nationalist minority in Northern Ireland can be expressed by the Irish Republic government and thus give a political opportunity to the minority in Northern Ireland, and hopefully reduce the support there for terrorism without Irish Republic involvement in the running of affairs in Northern Ireland.

What would have been unacceptable?

Decisions. The actual ability to decide as distinct from advising on matters concerning the minority in Northern Ireland. So, any situation where the British government would require the Irish government's agreement to any action or policy would be unacceptable. Where we would have their advice, and where they would have opportunities to lobby us – and indeed reflect the views of the minority in Northern Ireland – that we would be willing to consider. We also wanted to defuse the issue by saying that the present constitutional situation in Northern Ireland would not change so long as a majority of the people there would not want it to change – with the implication that if one day there was a different majority view, there could be the unification of Ireland. It was the first time we really got the Republic to accept that there was no change as long as the majority did not want it to change.

What do you think were the motives of the Irish government?

I think they wanted to advance the interests of the Catholic minority in Northern Ireland, and they wanted a mechanism which would enable them to continue to represent those interests. I don't think they were trying to get even a process leading to the unification of Ireland, let alone the actual unification. They wanted procedures. They would have liked to have the Conference to have more powers, more changes concerning the RUC, prisons and detention, Catholic judges – some of which you can see in the Agreement. They wanted to get as much as they could, but they didn't want Northern Ireland to become part of the Republic in the short-term, and therefore they were willing to have a statement in the Agreement that that would not happen as long as the majority didn't want it. They would have liked to go further, but I think they were quite surprised to go as far as they did go.
It was a good agreement in its own content, because it was the beginning of a relationship between London and Dublin which had to exist if we were going to make progress on Northern Ireland. It was a necessary dimension to a framework of negotiation for the future; and it also gave the minority in Northern Ireland a clear understanding that they should have more of a voice in affairs. The weakness of the Agreement, and also its success, was that it antagonised the Unionists terribly. We did not consult them. Not because we forgot, but because there had been cases in the past – Sunningdale - where consulting them had led to the unravelling of the project. We decided that it was too risky. It was Margaret Thatcher's personal decision not to consult the Unionists until the very last minute when the thing was ready. That had two effects. It antagonised them horribly, but the other thing was that it showed them that they could not simply say No to every change in Northern Ireland, simply standing on the argument that democracy is the rule of the majority, and we are the majority. They had to accept

that the British government had some other options, and that was an influence that would lead them to negotiation.

Do you think that it was a conscious motive to entice the Unionists to agree to power-sharing by means of the Agreement?

It was impossible at that time to get the Unionists to agree to power-sharing. At the same time, it was essential to get a working relationship with Dublin and some means of giving expression to the interests of the minority. We were drawn by the absence of the possibility of power-sharing into this idea of neogtiationg with Dublin. The second cause and effect – and this was not a purpose but a result of the Agreement – was that the Unionists saw that they must actively defend their interests, because things could happen which they considered to be against their interests, such as Hillsborough. That was not an active purpose in our minds, and I think it would have been a risky purpose to give ourselves because that it was far from certain that it would have a positive effect. The effect could have been to turn them against any kind of negotiation for a very long time. In the end, one could say that he Anglo-Irish Agreement is a grandfather of the success we have today.

Why was the NIO only involved at a relatively late stage?

It was an extremely sensitive matter, and the Northern Ireland Office, especially in its Belfast wing, had many people who would have been against the project.

Was there a conspiracy at the top of the Foreign Office to work towards a united Ireland?

That's untrue. The momentum for this did not principally come from the Foreign Office. It came from Robert Armstrong, with Douglas Hurd in favour. It is true that David Goodall believed in the need to give the minority a voice in their own affairs. To say it was only Foreign Office would be wrong, but to say that one of the key intellectual contributions came from the Foreign Office is true. Still, the project was not about moving towards a united Ireland.

What made Margaret Thatcher sign the Agreement?

I suppose she was convinced by Robert Armstrong and Geoffrey Howe (who was very much in favour of this) that the thing she feared – the erosion of Unionism and the Union – was not being given away in this Agreement, and that there were gains which were valuable to us. Robert Armstrong managed the business of informing and getting approval from Mrs Thatcher at each stage through the story very well. She was frequently involved, she wasn't remote at all.There was, for example, the question of how to call the inter-governmental body, a conference or committee. We didn't want to call it a conference, because a conference is a negotiating body. The Irish wanted conference because in Irish English, committee means a village discussion and does not sound serious. Mrs Thatcher was consulted at least twice on this word. That gives you an idea of how she was involved.

Is it true to say, then, that the Agreement was a high priority at the top level of government?

It wasn't Mrs Thatcher saying: we have got to have this, it is a real purpose of this government. It wasn't essential in our management of Northern Ireland. It was a private negotiation where we were finding out whether there was an arrangement which would do good without paying an unacceptable price. As we went along, it seemed more and more likely that we could achieve that, and we did.

What, in your opinion, was the influence of Irish America?

It was important. The Agreement gave us an answer to a lot of unjustified American criticism of British policy. A big part of our purpose in America was to show that there was another way: that there isn't just the bullet, but that the ballot box can play an important role. We hoped – as a side-effect – to influence American opinion away from criticism of the British government for doing nothing and from supporting the IRA financially. It was a valuable effect that we hoped for.

What were the main sticking points in the negotiations?

The formulation that the Irish Republic would accept that Northern ireland would remain part of the United Kingdom was difficult, and it was only later that we got the change in the Irish Constitution to remove any indication of a claim to Northern Ireland. That whole subject was the most politically resonant issue. Then, there was security issues, notably prisons and the RUC, because the Irish Republic wanted much more than we could give at the time. Of course, there was also the issue of establishing an ongoing machinery. We were very carefully limiting the role of the Anglo-Irish Conference so we could not be accused of handing away sovereignty.

How do you think the government thought of the Anglo-Irish Agreement? As a durable framework, or as a step towards devolution?

The British purpose was to achieve devolution again. And we certainly thought that the existence of this Agreement would make it easier, as it ultimately did. We did not regard it as the end of the process, but as a milestone along a road towards re-establishing devolved government. Fundamentally, there was a moment of potential accord because we knew that the Irish Republic did not want Northern Ireland to join the Irish Republic for the present time. And they knew that the British public's view of Northern Ireland was that if the Northern Irish people wanted in majority to leave the United Kingdom, that that wouldn't be a great problem for the people of Great Britain. So, both these things were understood by everyone, and were the general backdrop against which the negotiation of specifics could happen. There was knowledge that the long-term positions of the two governments were not bound to be incompatible.

Michael Mates, 21 March 2002

What was your view of the security situation at the time?

The campaign was very active, soldiers, policemen, and indeed civilians were being killed. We were getting better at catching them. Intelligence was starting to come together, and I think we were laying the ground then for the necessity of Sinn Fein and the IRA to change their tactics because it was starting to hurt them seriously.

The British military posture had an effect on bringing the Republicans to think about peace...

Yes, it did. So had the Loyalist paramilitaries, it has to be said. They started knocking off key IRA men. Before, they had just been random killers. Now they became more selective.

What did you make of the fact that the IRA was talking about peace whilst escalating their campaign?

This was to get the British government's attention. They thought they were safer if they operated on the mainland. This turned out to be wrong because everybody except one who has been involved in mainland operations has actually been arrested and convicted.

My strategy was first and foremost to get the intelligence right. It was getting better, it needed to get better still. Good intelligence is the key to all things. We had some gaps which I intended to fill. The second priority was to tackle robustly the sources of terrorist finance. By cutting off their funds, it cut down their effectiveness. At that stage, just to operate the IRA cost £10m a year. That was just to maintain the families of those who were in prison, their children, Christmas presents, mortgages, etc. The deal was that if you were a terrorist and you went to prison, the organisation would take care of you. It seemed to me that if you cut that money off, people were getting less willing to go to war. If they were caught, it would be a disaster to their families and friends. The third, in which I failed, was to try and get better control of the prisoners. That had gone too far.

1993 was the first year in which the security forces did not kill anyone. What was the reason for that?

There was no change in policy. The rules about opening fire remained constant, they were refined, but not changed basically. There were some breaches of those rules. Three members of the Scots Guards were actually sent to prison for breaching those rules.

Is it true to say that the IRA mainland campaign made it more difficult for you to react positively to Republican demands for talks?

There was never any difficulty in wanting to talk rather than kill. We always said that if they stop killing people, and if they give up their arms, we will treat them in no different way. The fact that there kept being these spectaculars made it more difficult to understand why – covertly and openly – Adams and the other IRA men wanted to talk. Now, one understands that there was a debate going on in the organisation itself as to whether they should go down the political road or not. It was a debate which Adams and McGuinness won, but at some cost.

We knew that there were difficulties. It was when we got the first message that we fully understood, but there were indications beforehand. I have received an indication in November 1992 that the traditional Christmas ceasefire was going to be extended. I made a lot of contingency plans as to what we would do if it was extended, and I got the Army and police to do the same, so that if it did happen, we were ready to respond in a way that they could see. We always said: you stop the killing, we start the talking. That's what Coleraine was all about.

What was the purpose of the Coleraine speech?

It was to make it perfectly clear, and it seemed a good time to do it: we had just had an election, Mayhew and I were new. So, we were setting out what we wanted to do, and we told them that the terrorist campaign was very pointless, and that there were benefits if they changed their mind. We made another one which was directed much more at the Unionists. They were two very carefully balanced positions papers, if you want to put it that way.

Did that first message from the IRA had a tangible impact on policy?

We all became much more optimistic. It was a very, very closely guarded secret, and we then set to think about how we are going to bring this about. That finished up with Albert Reynolds and John Major standing outside of Downing Street, which was in December 1993. They didn't stop the violence until August 1994, because they weren't ready to. We then knew that there was a fundamental row going on.

Was the small majority of the Conservatives in the House of Commons a stumbling block?

It was not ever a significant issue. It was an issue of timing sometimes. John Major would not have let something like that interfere with something to which he was that dedicated to.

Did you assume that if an inclusive settlement was a possibility, that that would imply the release of prisoners?

Yes. We were light years away from that, but we knew that any deal would have to involve prisoners and decommissioning. We knew that it would be very difficult to sell to the Unionists, which is why we said that there had to be a referendum, and that we would have to sell it. At that stage, there were contigency plans for further liberalisation in the prisons and for other measures which would make the military and police presence less impressive to the Nationalists. All of that was subject to the security situation, and up until the ceasefire there was only a limited amount people could do.

There was this balance that had to be struck. My aim was not to get up to the nose of the Republicans as much as we had to in the past, because they were killing people, and we had some successes with that.

What was the purpose behind the banning of the UDA?

It was always up for discussion. There was an incident which made us say that we are going to do it. Banning the UDA didn't really change anything. It was more a declaration of intent. One of the arguments for not banning it was because the RUC was largely Protestant, their intelligence on Loyalist paramilitaries was very, very good. And if you ran them underground, it was harder to get the intelligence. Almost every time, there was a Loyalist crime, we locked someone up for it. The police knew who they were, because they were their own people. The police always said that if you are going to ban them, that would be a political gesture but you would make our job harder. That's why the balance was always slightly in favour of not doing it.

Do you think the Loyalists were largely reactive?

Yes, except for some.

Lord Mayhew, 7 March 2002

It was argued that the main reason for the failure of the Brooke/Mayhew talks in 1991-92 was the intransigence of the Irish government. Would you concur with that view?

It was. The talks were limited to seeking Heads of Agreement. It was a very remarkable achievement that the parties had been brought together by my predecessor, Peter Brooke. I had to continue the talks five days after I had appointed. I felt it was very hard on Peter Brooke. It would have been much better if Peter Brooke had been able to continue. I didn't know the Irish politicians, or the Northern Ireland ones. We overcame those difficulties. We made enough progress in Strand One, the internal strand, to proceed to Strand Two and bring the Irish government in. They sent a team of four ministers. The reason that there were four was because of the dynamics of coalition government in the Republic. Those talks failed because the Irish government, with an eye to a general election coming early the following year, refused to say that they would, in any circumstances, recommend that Articles 2 and 3 of the Irish Constitution should be removed. They said they couldn't do it. That was seen as a total breach of faith by the Unionists, and – I am bound to say – by us. Then, the Irish said that they were going to demand a resumption of the Inter-governmental Conferences, and as a result, they brought it down.

Throughout the whole peace process, the Irish government is often portrayed as imaginative, whilst the British government is seen as defensive.

The Irish were responsible for the end of the talks, and it took four years to start them again. I think we could have made great progress in early 1993. But that's politics. They were a coalition, and nobody was prepared to take that step.

When was the point you realised, or indeed decided, that Sinn Fein could be brought into the process?

We didn't deal with Sinn Fein at all in my time. During the ceasefire which occurred in 1994, I had three meetings with Adams and McGuinness – not to negotiate, but to clarify our position. Then, we had Canary Wharf and the ceasefire was expressly broken. As a result, we had no negotiations with Sinn Fein at all. But we were conscious that Hume had been talking with Adams, but we never saw any proposals of the Hume/Adams talks. We thought it would be very difficult for Sinn Fein to hold out against what Hume was proclaiming, which was the necessity for a settlement to be based on consent. I don't think there was any watershed.

When the Irish proposed the idea of a joint declaration, were you enthusiastic about it?

I think that we were always very careful about – what one might call – "jointery". We realised that fear was the principal motivator for almost everyone's political position. Unionists feared that the British government had got tired of them all. The British government, they thought, would just ship them off to Dublin. The Nationalists thought that the British government would once again give self-government to Northern Ireland on the basis of Catholics as second-class citizens, as they undoubtedly had. We had to recognise the fears. "Jointery" played towards confirming the fears of Unionists, so we had to recognise it. Equally, if we could get the Irish government with us to state the principle of consent and drop the territorial claim, that would have removed an absolutely impossible stumbling block for all Unionists. I saw from the very beginning that the key was to restore devolved government, but this time on a fair basis. I reckoned that people would much rather sit down around an executive table instead of going on being ruled by Mayhew. If that could be achieved, then they would stay.

Wasn't it a main purpose of the Joint Declaration to bring about the ceasefire by the IRA?

Of course. We hoped that if the IRA – the Loyalist paramilitaries were just as evil, but they were largely reactive – were genuinely concerned for a democratic settlement, and if they saw both governments signing up for the consent principle, it would be very difficult for them to maintain an armed campaign.

You had already tried that with the Coleraine speech...

Yes, but you have to go on saying the same things time and time again. It's no good treating things like a lawyer, stating that you said it in Coleraine. The Joint Declaration was quite a turning point. It was very influential in America. But it was touch and go, right up to the last minute.

It is sometimes argued that arguments between the British and Irish sides followed a certain choreography...

It wasn't a choreography to which we were willing partners at all. If I had just been dealing with Dick Spring alone, we could have made much faster progress. He had a very committed Republican hierarchy in the DFA, which I think restrained him to some extent.

How far do you think Irish-America was a disruptive influence?

It was very unhelpful that the 1994 visa was given to Adams. I slightly wonder, in retrospect, whether we made too much of it. I know that the American ambassador, Ray Seitz, was outraged that it was done, but I think it did, in retrospect, give Clinton the opportunity to lean on Adams. When Clinton came to Northern Ireland in November 1995, he did extraordinarily well. It was quite necessary for him to temper what he was saying. What he said was extremely well put. He told the Republicans that they were part of yesterday's story. It was necessary for him to be able to meet Adams, and he did – we stagemanaged it.

Is it fair, therefore, to argue that you translated the initial disadvantage of Clinton interfering into an advantage?

That's quite right, we did. The Americans started by saying that they would have a peace envoy. That would have gone like a red ballon to my party and with the Unionists. Equally, we saw the need for a perceptive approach and understanding in the White House, with 40 million Irish Americans. No president can ignore 40 million Irish Americans! What we wanted was an American president, particular an American president, who understood what the problem was about, and began to understand how Unionists of a decent, constitutional kind thought. Clinton did that. We told the

Americans that two thirds in Northern Ireland wished the province to stay part of the Union, and many American very surprised. They said: oh, it's not quite as simple as we thought.

How confident did you feel about the ceasefires?

I didn't feel confident about the ceasefires, and one couldn't – given the language in which it was expressed, and given the refusal to get rid of any of the arms. That's the difficulty that we faced.

We thought the ceasefires came about because of the revulsion about the hideous things that each side had done: Greysteel, Loughinisland, the Shankill. But we had the policy of encouraging people, sit down and talks, so as to get devolved government. Unionists, however, were saying that they weren't going to sit down with people who had these arms, and who are prepared to back up what they have said with arms. That was a position we were faced with in relation to the Unionists. As a result, we had to press for it. Nobody expressed it more strongly than Dick Spring himself after the Downing Street Declaration, when he went back to the Dail the next day and said that we were not talking about a token gesture, but that we wanted the whole lot to be handed up straight away. He said it again a month later, so it wasn't a unilateral British attitude. The Irish backed off later.

Decommissioning was a confidence-building measure for the Unionists...

Yes. First of all, it was the first and most elementary earnest that Republicans were prepared to accept democratic principles. You can't do that if you are prepared to back up your arguments with bombs. That, of course, was the stumbling block.

Did you nevertheless see Adams and McGuinness as politicos who needed to be strengthened against the militants within their own movement?

I think that both of them realised that they were not going to win by military means, and they adopted political means, but they are of course trying to hold as powerful a political hand as they can. What is upsetting for the Unionists is that all the concessions seem to come forward one way, sometimes in breach of clear undertakings given by the Prime Minister. They see Adams as holding an increasingly strong hand. That is not to say that the Belfast Agreement was not a great achievement. It undoubtedly was.

Was it your aim to strengthen Adams?

I can't say it was. We welcomed the ceasefire, and we welcomed the message we had, and which they later denied, through the link that we had. The value of that was destroyed by journalists who published it, having it from somewhere we don't know.

Were you surprised by the outrage the Framework Documents caused in Unionist ranks?

It was very tendentiously leaked. Bits and pieces were put out, and the Times ran it as a leading story which began with the word that Northern Ireland was closer to a united Ireland than ever before. If you put it like that, what do you expect?

What was your view on prisoners at the time?

They were never, in our time, linked to any bargaining. There wasn't any bargaining with the Republicans. I think it was absolutely right and realistic that in the Good Friday Agreement early release formed a term. In practice, there could be no settlement with the paramilitaries – Republicans and Loyalists – unless people whom they regarded as political prisoners were released. Therefore, I don't complain. The Prime Minister has now tipped over. He gave Trimble the assurance that there would be no prisoners out if there was no disarmament. That's where they went wrong. When the street violence was going on, the answer should have been to keep the ringleaders inside. That was the one lever the government had, and it threw it away.

There should have been a clear link?

Yes.

Roland Moyle, 7 March 2001

Did you regard NI as an integral part of the UK, or rather as a natural constituent of Ireland?

In 1968, the Labour Party was very pro-Catholic. The Unionists were regarded as seriously oppressive, and indeed they were. The Catholics were basically republican in their political philosophy, and they wanted the whole of NI united with the South. Certainly there was every justification for the Labour

Party's view. We went to Londonderry, for example, and there we met a chap called Major Glover. He described how they had to provide a vast amount of housing for poorer classes after the war, and that meant the Catholics. So he put all the Catholics in this big housing estate in Creggan. There must have been 25,000 votes, and he made sure that all the Catholic votes were in one ward. Then there was the Waterside, they had about 7,000 votes, they elected 3 councillors, and so had the Diamond. The whole thing was gerrymandered, so there would always be 6 Unionist councillors, and 3 Roman Catholic councillors, and that went on all through Northern Ireland.
In those days, housing allocation in this country was done on a strict points basis. Occasionally, local councillors could intervene and modify the rules about who got a council house or not, but nothing staggering ever took place. In Northern Ireland, when you were a Unionists councillor and a Unionist came to you and wanted a house, he got it. The Catholics were, of course, always at the bottom of the list.
The electoral system was corrupted as well. The Westminster elections were of course governed by Westmister Acts of Parliament, and that was fair enough. But the local government franchise, and the local government service too, was overwhelmingly in favour of Unionists, and they made sure it would remain so. The first Protestant Prime Minister of Northern Ireland, James Craig, said that he wanted a Protestant Parliament for a Protestant people.
The RUC was 92% Protestant and 8% Catholic. Most Catholics were from the district of Moyle. They were a small Catholic community which was cut off from the main Catholic community and assimilated well.
Then there was the B Specials. This was a sort of part-time police force, and their job was to be called up in emergencies, and they used to go into Catholic areas. The B Specials would go in to the Catholic areas and beat them up, smash doors, windows.
And all this was because it was thought that the Northern Ireland border was a temporary affair whilst the Irish were sorting themselves out. The English would never understand that the Irish couldn't sort themselves out. The border was cunningly designed to pack 300 miles of border into Northern Ireland, totally irrational, totally unprotected. The result was that all sorts of other devices had to be adopted by Ulster Unionists to keep the Catholics at bay. They had the B Spceials, the corrupt local government, there was rigorous discrimination in employment. If jobs were freely available to Catholics, they would be coming up from the South and take the jobs, and use the social services. So that was another way of maintaining the border in the absence of more rigid border control as used to be the case in Europe before the last World War, for example.

Did you see them as British citizens?

Legally, they were UK citizens, except that some of the Catholics had Irish passports as well as British passports. The desire of the Ulster Unionists to be British, and they were a majority, was self-evident. They thought of themselves as British. I accepted that claim, it was a fact. Most of them had come from Scotland, originally settled in the early 17th century. They had always thought of themselves as British. They say they were Irish in the sense that a Welshman says he is Welsh, but an Irishman from the South says he is Irish in the sense that a Frenchman would say he is French. It is totally different.

Did the Loyalist Workers strike change anything, that is, when British citizens defied a UK law?

There was a very strong mood in the civil service, and in the Conservative Party too, and obviously amongst certain sections of the Labour Party, that it was all very much an anachronism in an age of international co-operation. It would be far simpler if Ireland was united. This basic feeling was, again, evidence for the English not being able to understand the Irish.
Stan Orme, for example, when we was in opposition in the early 70s and in the 60s, when he was a backbencher, he thought that NI ought to be part of all Ireland, and he always had that private view although he always followed British government policy in practice. So there was that feeling, but the greater feeling was: they are an incomprehensible people.
First of all, people couldn't understand why they were fighting about religion, that's how it was always presented. It was about much more than that. The Protestants were basically as distinct racially from the Catholics as it was possible to be. To put it crudely, the Protesatnts were basically Teutons from the South of Scotland, and there were the Irish dwellers, who were Celts. They were different in religion, which played an important part, and they were different economically. The Protestants basically organised the industrial area in Belfast, and there was also the issue of losing employment as a way of defending the border. All these differences ran down the same trench.

What did you think about Sunningdale?

One hoped it would succeed, but I never had any great confidence. I assumed the Unionists would not put up with it. One of the things you must know about NI is that there have been various Unionist leaders who realised that the support of the rest of the UK was necessary, and so they always tried to maintain good relations with the government at Westminster and would compromise. Every Unionist leader that has come to power and tried to compromise with the Westminster government, is no longer a Unionist leader with any standing in NI. There is only one Unionist leader who is still a Unionist

leader, and that is the Rev Ian Paisley, and he has never ever compromised with the British government under any circumstance. There is a certain anti-British government feeling.

What did you think about this idea of Ulster Nationalism?

I was aware that some people thought that with the growth of the European Union, independence would be an option. After all, Ulster was bigger than Luxemburg, so why couldn't Ulster be an independent state within the European Union?
It was definitely not government policy. It was government policy to use the growth of the EEC, as it then was, to try and help to solve several problems. It was never outright government policy to declare Ulster an independent state. There were individuals with that attitude, and they were hoping that it was to come about, but it was never within any distance of becoming government policy.

What did you think about the ceasefire?

...
Officially we were not supposed to be talking to the 'enemy'. Nevertheless, rather like a war, although the two sides are fighting, there is always some sort of connection between the two sides to find out about what the other side is doing.
...

What was your economic and social policy? Were there differences?

There was one issue that arose. Shipbuilding was nationalised in the UK, and the Northern Irish people were very keen to have Harland and Wolff nationalised, and the British government refused, I suppose, on the basis that if there ever was a united Ireland, it would be much easier to include Harland & Wolff under the new set-up. That was the one major clash that took place in which NI didn't follow the rest of the United Kingdom.
...

How about housing? How high was that on the agenda?

Very high. There was a feeling that if you build these new housing estates, and if you put Protestants and Catholics in them, the combination of mixing the two lots up with the fact that they had new and better housing would certainly very sharply ameliorate the tensions in NI. Of course it didn't work. Either one side or the other was in the majority. And they would make sure that their estate was cleansed of the opposite group. They used to set each other's houses on fire if the minority wouldn't accept the majority social pressures.

Material inequality was an issue as well. What was your government's approach at that time?

We were trying to break down discrimination in employment in Northern Ireland as the chief way of making sure that Catholics had the same standard of living as Protestants. Protestants were determined for that not to happen because it was a way of defending the border.
We set up the Fair Employment Agency to make sure that no one was discriminating against the Catholics. It was not easy because the educational set up was such that Catholics – broadly speaking – had not the same level of education.

How did you assess the impact of the school system?

There is no doubt about it that the two sectarian school systems reinforced the divisions in the community. Therefore, all the worthy reformers wanted an integrated school system. ... I started off saying that it is worthwhile exploring, it seemed obvious sense. The great problem was that the Catholic bishops were absolutely determined to keep their Catholics out of the state system. They wanted them to be dedicated to the Catholic church. I had a special relationship with the Catholic church in that respect because I was given the job of meeting the bishops to talk about it. There was a conference in Oxford in which Merlyn Rees got up and said what a good idea it was to have integrated schools. Nevertheless, the bishops were determined for that not to happen.
Every policy in Northern Ireland is either a Unionist policy or a Catholic policy, and the idea of getting an integrated school system is in effect a Unionist policy because they hope that the Catholics can be trained to accept loyalty to the Unionist government at Stormont.
...

From your point of view, what were the main difficulties with regard to police primacy?

Obviously, there was a considerable amount of suspicion on behalf of the Catholics. There was a fear that the result would be that the RUC would return to its old ways. The other problem was that the Army felt that it really had the responsibility of maintaining law and order, and the idea of giving the RUC supremacy would make their job much more difficult. It was not as strong as it might have been

because the Chief Constable of the RUC was an Englishman called Ken Newman. That softened the argument. The Army would privately argue their case, but of course they are trained to finally accept the political direction, and so they did.

How did you try to make the Catholics accept the RUC?

We were hoping that by making the RUC a normal British police force, and treating it that way, we would eventually soften Catholic opposition to the RUC. It was an appalling organisation when we went to NI. In 1969, when all these troubles in NI erupted, the RUC decided to quell the riots in Belfast by getting out one or two armoured cars. They would drive along the Falls Road, and every time they came to a junction, they would fire a burst of machine gun fire. A nine-year old boy was killed. It was incredible. That was not policing as anyone had known it in the British isles. We really wanted to disarm the RUC altogether, and make it a British police force. Of course, because of the IRA we couldn't go that far, because the RUC would have felt totally naked. In 1974, it was basically the same approach.

...

Why did you feel it was necessary to pursue police primacy? Because you wanted British soldiers back to the mainland, or was it necessary to civilise the situation?

We thought it was necessary to civilise the situation, to start with. The Army are not trained to do policing. They would kick the doors down and send the troops in. It was all very rough. The Catholic were all very pro-Army in the beginning, but by the time the Tory government came in, they had turned against the British Army who they regarded as an occupying power. On top of that, our defence people were taking the view that the job of the Britih army was to defend the North German plain from the Red Army, not chasing around the backstreets of Belfast. They were not trained for it; it was a dissipation of resources.

...

I've always taken the view that if we had had a National Service Army when the Troubles blew up, we would never have been able to maintain the British Army in NI on a security role for as long as we have done.

By the time Northern Ireland came along, all British soldiers were regulars, full-time employees, career soldiers. That meant in practice that there was a lot of sympathy when a young lad from Blackheath would join the Army, go off to Northern Ireland, be shot dead, and then be brought back for his funeral. But then there was alwas the argument that he volunteered for that risk. So there was never quite the same tension, and the desperate need to get the troops out, like in Cyprus in the 1960s, where they were forced to join the Army and undertake the peacekeeping in those places. ... Nevertheless, we always wanted to create a situation in which the British Army could be withdrawn apart from their normal peacetime garrison.

Did the mainland campaign of the Provisional IRA have an impact on your security decisions?

It had a short-term impact, but nothing really fundamental. After the 21 deaths in the Birmingham pub bombings, you had the activities of the West Midland police, who decided they really had to find someone. They got hold of the wrong people. That had a long-term effect on British policing.

In Birmingham, on the night after the bombings, there were crowds roaming the streets looking for some bloody Irishman they could find to beat up. But that quickly faded away, because there is a tremendous number of Irish people living in this country that have settled down here.

Paul Murphy, 20 March 2002

How did you persuade the Unionists to give up their stance on prior decommissioning?

I think they took the decision themselves. Clearly, they understood that in order to keep that peace process moving, it took very brave and courageous decisions, particularly by David Trimble. They realised that the only way they could do it was by talking together. It wasn't easy for them. I talked to David Trimble, explaining that it was important for everyone in this process to get together. In the first months, the actual business of personal relationships was very difficult, and you can understand why: there had been many years of conflict in Northern Ireland, people had lost friends and relatives. But eventually, as the months went by, we could see a warming of relations between different people. George Mitchell had to decide about the deadline, and you could physically see that people understood the importance of what was going to happen.

Over the Christmas period, there had been many deaths. I would wake up every morning, turn the radio on, and another person was killed. It was getting very bad, and the sensible politicans on both sides realised that if we were not going to resolve this, things were going to go backwards, not forward.

Is it fair to say that the momentum you had created after taking power was part of the reason why the Unionists were prepared to talk to Sinn Fein?

Yes, that's perfectly true, and there were three reasons. One was that there was a new government in the United Kingdom, a new set of ministers who were committed to bringing peace to Northern Ireland. The same happened in Ireland, with Fianna Fail coming in. The third was probably the British government's new policy on decentralisation and devolution. The Ulster Unionists realised that, if there was going to be devolution in Scotland and in Wales, then the chances of devolution in Northern Ireland were greater, and it wasn't special anymore for Northern Ireland to have a separate assembly. They could see that this was part of a British movement of devolution, and in a way they could be more comfortable with that. If there was a separate devolution, people would have questioned what was going on. That was one of the big reasons why Unionism realised that the world was changing, and that they had to jump on that changing train, because otherwise they would be left behind.

Did you accept that the DUP would not become part of a settlement, or did you try to woo them back?

We were always trying to bring them back into the process. We didn't stop talking to them. Although they weren't formally part of the talks structure, they were always involved in talks. I would meet them every couple of weeks. They were probably the most pro-devolution party and wanted an assembly. They wanted to take ministries, and be part of government in Northern Ireland. They didn't mind sharing government with the SDLP, but they minded sharing government with Sinn Fein. In terms of before and after the agreement, I would meet the DUP regularly to discuss matters affecting the assembly. They would, of course, also talk about other issues as well.

What was your view about decommissioning? Did you think it would ever happen?

We accepted it to be part of the agreement. If you are going to release prisoners – which was very difficult for many people to swallow – then there had to be quid pro quo of decommissioning of arms, and it was therefore part of the Good Friday Agreement. We expected that to happen, and we wanted it to happen. The mentality of Ireland was that you put your guns away and let them rust. It wasn't an easy one to manage, but it was vital. More important than the actual business of the weapons was the confidence-building measure that lay behind it. You had to give confidence to the peaceful community on both sides who had to ensure that the gun was kept out of politics.

The Conservatives argued that there should have been a clear link between prisoner release and decommissioning. Why was that not possible?

Everything that was agreed in the final week was very delicately agreed. They are all balancing acts. There was no direct link in terms of releasing 20 prisoners in exchange for 20 guns. That wouldn't work. But within the agreement both issues were addressed. In that sense, they are linked in that they are both part of the agreement. During the last week, the business of finalising the agreement went right to the wire. People who had to make that decision were the Northern Ireland parties – the British and Irish governments could have easily written all that in a day, but none of it would have worked. It had to be made by those parties themselves: they had to agree it. And they agreed, ultimately, that there was no direct link between the issues, but within the agreement itself.

Why was it so important to have the Irish government on side?

None of it would have worked. It would have been impossible. We would have not got the Nationalist side to play any part in the Agreement unless it was an absolute equality between the British and the Irish government. It wasn't simply a case that the Irish government would work with the SDLP and Sinn Fein, and we would co-operate with the Unionist parties. Although, there was a special relationship between the Nationalist parties generally and the Irish government. But it was more than that. When it came to the referendum, it was all-Ireland which voted, not just Northern Ireland. From the Nationalist and Republican side, the fact that the whole of Ireland voted in the way they did meant that the only way ahead was on the principle of consent.

The British government was the only participant that could not afford to be partisan...

You can overdo it by suggesting that the Irish government was in no way interested in what the Unionists would do. They were. One good aspect of the Agreement was that there was a greater development of relationships between the Unionists and the Irish government.
We, as a British government, are in a different position. It is often said that the Irish government looks after the Nationalists, and the British government looks after the Unionists. We couldn't do it like that, because – whatever you think about it – the British government actually governs both communities. That's the difference. As it happens, Nationalists and Unionists in Northern Ireland both live under the British state. There's a responsibility on behalf of British statesmen to look after everybody in that part of the United Kingdom. The Irish government don't govern Northern Ireland – we do. We have a special

responsibility to look after everybody's interest, and especially to bring them together and work out a compromise.

Was it an aim of the British government to strengthen the position of Adams and McGuinness as doves within the Republican movement?

It was very important for there to be a good and sensible leadership of the Republican movement. In that sense, Adams and McGuinness played a vital role in the establishment of the peace process. Again, it wasn't just a political process, but it was a peace process as well. The position of the leadership was critical to that. The fact that I could meet the representatives from Sinn Fein was a vital part of the agreement.

Where would you have drawn the line?

That's speculation. All we know is that there were two occasions when Sinn Fein and then the UDP were excluded. Both sides had problems, that's the nature of the problem. It's not as neat and tidy as one would imagine. I can't speculate as to what would have led to the permanent exclusion, but it wasn't going to happen because they were committed to it.

In the final night, is it fair to say that the Nationalists gave way on Strand 2 whereas the Unionists made concessions in Strand 1, which then made the agreement possible?

Yes, I think that's a fair analysis. Strand 1 was finalised after Strand 2 was dealt with because Strand 2 was by far the most difficult. I was waiting in my office at three o'clock in the morning when Reg Empey and John Hume knocked on my door and said that they had finally cracked it, and that they wanted to talk about the details of Strand 1. In an hour after that, all the remaining issues were resolved.

You can often read about the crucial behind the scenes role of Mr Clinton. What did that entail?

I can tell you in general that it was enormously important. He phoned up all the parties, and every single telephone call was crucial. The Prime Minister and him were constantly on the telephone in backing up the process. It was important for both, it was a question of reassurance. In some ways, Nationalism needed that support a bit more than Unionists. After all, this was the leader of the Western world.

Did you think the British government sacrificed any principles?

No, far from it.

Prisoner releases...

Say that to South Africans. No one liked any of those things, but remember that people voted for this. It is easy for an observer sitting in Leeds or London pondering about whether this is right or wrong. The issues is: what do people in Northern Ireland think about this? They had to put up with all this over the years. At the end of the day, although the governments put forward these proposals, the people voted on them – they voted for prisoner release as well as for decommissioning. Some people didn't like it, but they lost in the referendum. After all, what is the principle? The principle is the long-term stability and future and prosperity of Northern Ireland, and without that agreement, that would not have happened.

Sir Richard Needham, 14 November 2001

What did you feel when the Anglo-Irish Agreement was concluded?

Personally, it was fear that we would end up with no friends from any side. Because I was responsible for Environment and Health, there had to be political concern as to whether those services would continue to be delivered, remembering the strike of the power-sharing Executive in 1974. I was totally excluded from the negotiations. I knew it was happening, but no details. There was no involvement of junior ministers in the discussions. Our views were never sought.

Do you think the outrage was justified?

In a way it was. The fact that it was signed at Hillsborough was an enormous outrage to the Unionist people. It was like signing away East Prussia in the Reichstag. It was an unbelievable insult.

Did the Agreement bring about any changes?

The Agreement was very one-sided, because it allowed the Irish government a say in the affairs of the North, without any corresponding rights for the British government to raise issues about the governance of the South. The fact that the Protestants had literally disappeared in the South was totally excluded. In the eyes of the Loyalists of the North, the Nationalists were all good, and they were all bad. The Irish government could complain about everything – they were all surrogates for the SDLP anyway – whereas the Loyalists had to look for the British government, whilst the British government had to be neutral. To the Loyalist people, it was very one-sided.

Why did Margaret Thatcher sign up to it?

Perhaps because Robert Armstrong persuaded her that there was no security solution, and there was no political solution without the close involvement of the South. And Robert Armstrong was right because, although the Southern government continued to behave afterwards as having power without responsibility, it did over time give the South a better understanding of the real issues that confronted the British government in the North. It gave them a better feel, although for the first years, they continued to be extraordinarily insensitive for the position of the Protestants. It was the right thing to do, and definitely a major step forward in the resolution of the issues. It also helped to reconcile Irish-American attitudes to some extent, although at that time they didn't have the same degree of influence as under Clinton. But it was a very hairy time in the sense that the Loyalists were determined to do everything they could through what institutions they had to make life impossible.

Can you think of any piece of legislation that would not have happened without the Agreement?

I wonder whether Fair Employment would have happened. Also, there were a whole raft of measures in my areas which we looked at and rejected, and which happened later, like Irish road names.

We didn't make any real concessions to the Unionists, with the exception of the declaration against terrorism. But as a result of the one-sided nature of the Agreement, the British government made very considerable concessions to the Irish government, much more than without. Why? Because it gave the Irish government a seat at the table, and they could raise any issue. So, what the British government also had to do was to maintain in some way the tacit acceptance of the Agreement by the Loyalist community. The British government's position was that we had to make sure that the Loyalist community were not going to think that they were going to get sold down the river. There were endless rumours, such as that the RUC were going to change its colours. The first few months were extremely difficult.

There was no sophisticated process of marketing the Agreement to the public... If New Labour had been around in 1985, the Agreement would have been spun with much greater professionalism. I couldn't believe how bad it was. We were always on the backfoot. We were always having to react. There was no proper plan to promote it. But we kept the lid on the Loyalist community. It wasn't 1974.

We then started our own programme of economic and social regeneration, involving people on both sides. We started to develop policies which began to make Northern Ireland feel better, and put Sinn Fein and the IRA on the backfoot. Every time they blew up an economic target we blamed them for destroying jobs. So, our new schemes became a significant element in settling the province down. We were also clever in putting all the blame for anti-Agreement disruptions on the Councils. When they left the dustbins uncollected, we asked how piling up rubbish helped the Loyalist community change the Anglo-Irish Agreement. Whatever action they took we turned it back on them. Provided we kept the essential services running, and we did not lose the support of the police, we could continue to govern – just... during the hours of daylight.

...

What was your impression of the Northern Ireland civil service?

Secrecy was used as a cover for incompetence by the mostly English senior civil servants in the NIO who were sent to Northern Ireland and knew little about the Province. That's why they were on the defensive. The Northern Ireland civil service remained utterly professional, but they weren't ever used in finding a political solution. They now serve Sinn Fein ministers with the same degree of professionalism as British ministers. It was a monstrous misuse of local talent.

Did the British government consider Irish America in policy making?

In the Foreign Office they did. Did it influence security policy? No. Did it influence British political policy? I don't know. Not much. Reagan wasn't putting on any great pressure. The Irish American politicians were all Democrats, and during the Reagan years, there was not much influence.

The key factor was that we were not going anywhere without a greater degree of support from the South. And Armstrong was clearly coming to the view that the involvement of the Southern government was absolutely vital. The Foreign Office also held the view that there wasn't going to be a Republican

Administration forever, and at some time, Irish Americans would have a greater influence on a Democratic government. The other issue was that a lot of money was raised for the IRA in America.

Was the RUC a law unto themselves? How did you see security policy at the time?

Absolutely. This is also true for the Army, though. The Northern Ireland Office had no control over the Army, that was the MoD. The RUC had this powerful warlord, Sir Jack Hermon, and he did what he liked. He happened to be a very civilised man, but his problem was that he hadn't had anyone to deal with fraud and racketeering – until Tom King brought in an anti-racket squad. Things like building fraud came under the DHSS oder the Department of Environment. But how could we deal with it? It was an extraordinary incompetence that neither the Northern Ireland Office nor the RUC realised or had put in place sufficient funds and manpower to cover over blackmail, fraud, racketeering, and that I had responsibility for social security fraud. Even the Italians couldn't run Sicily like that.

How can shoot-to-kill be explained?

The problem goes back to any police force where it is impossible to administer justice. The whole basis of a free society is based on the ability of the police to get people accused into a court and try them. If people don't give eivdence, what do you do? You take the law into your hands.

Even the Diplock Courts couldn't get people to give evidence. We knew who was guilty. But when the administration of justice breaks down, the police either sit in their barracks and play cards or take the law into their own hands.

What really concerned me about the police was –the Special Branch were a law unto themselves anway –that there was no political control from the Northern Ireland Office or the Police Authority, and therefore there was no intelligent strategic direction. There was no proper managerial oversight; things that had to be done never got done. But that was not the problem of shoot-to-kill. Whatever control you had over the police at the top, you would still have policemen shooting to kill because there was no political way of dealing with them.
We got the supergrasses. They were people who were giving the evidence, but because they were being paid large amounts of money, the evidence didn't stand up, so we were back where we were before

Were different policies co-ordinated?

They were not co-ordinated. Of course, they were not. That was the problem. There was endless talk about it.

You were doing your own thing?

I was doing whatever I wanted in my departments. I had a clear strategy, which was to rebuild the cities, to give people places where they could come together, to get the social infrastructure right, to go on the offensive against Sinn Fein and the IRA, and every time they blew something up, to ask: Mr Adams, why do you this? John Hume was enormously helpful. We managed to twist the whole thing around. By the end, we got the people of West Belfast to take ownership of their city, where they could find jobs. They were then going back into the ghettoes and asking the IRA: what are you doing?

So, economic policy had a political function?

Yes. But that was the first time that we had a coherent economic and social policy on the fight against terrorism.

How did you experience Thatcherism in Northern Ireland?

I ran the main spending departments, most didn't like the privatisation of Harland and Shorts, but they went along with it. They even welcomed the privatisation of Electricity.It took longer in Northern Ireland, but in the end it did happen.

It was very important to keep the trade unions as a pillar for good. More than anything else, delays in introducing legislation for Northern Ireland were related to finding Parliamentary time. The government whips couldn't care less for Northern Ireland legislation. We had to prioritise trade union reform or getting a declaration against violence? The latter was very important, so we did it first.

What we did in Belfast was to reduce the amount of subsidy to industry. We switched it away from direct subsidies into improving facilities for training and things like that. We introduced the reforms of the health service, even though we didn't use Great British language, like introducing the market to

healthcare. The overall amount of public subsidy went down as a percentage of GDP, from 70 to about 55 per cent. We transferred enormous chunks of the Northern Ireland economy out of the public into the private sector. In city regeneration, we used exactly the same carrot and stick approach as we used in Liverpool and Manchester, just with greater imagination. We attracted an enormous amount of private money into Belfast, about £1bn.

Did you have ay contact with Sinn Fein?

Not until 1990. We decided early in 1990 without telling anybody, because of what we were doing in Springvale, we had to involve Gerry Adams. We never told the Secretary of State, though.

What about Conway Mill?

That was definitely a Sinn Fein/IRA front organisation. There were lots of very good priests in West Belfast, but there was a dilemma. In a lot of senses, the views of the Catholic church in relation to social issues and education did keep the divisions of Northern Ireland society going. But the Church was, on the other hand, standing between us and the abyss. So, by and large, they were a force for good.

Lord Orme, 6 March 2001

Did you regard NI as an integral part of the UK, or rather as a natural constituent of Ireland?

I have been brought up in Manchester, and there was a strong Irish connection.... As a socialist I was interested in Irish politics, but not as a major forefornt issue. When I was elected to the House of Commons in 1964, we found that here in Parliament, that the Unionists dominated the situation. You couldn't raise issues, it was ruled out of order. Right in the middle of this was a Campaign for Democracy in Ulster. That gained momentum. Ireland was discussed on a scale that had not been discussed before. I took part in these discussion. Paul Rose was the chairman of the CDU, and I was the Secretary.
If you ask me what were my views: my views were that I was in favour of a united Ireland. I didn't believe it was an issue to go to war on. I believed that it would be a long and painful process, but I didn't realise how long and how painful it would be to get general acceptance.
Obviously, when people's emotions were roused, we were faced with a different situation. With all the marches and protests in 1969, that was the beginning of 30 years of political activity.

Did you think the Sunningdale Executive viable?

Well, we all supported it, but we were amazed how fragile it was, and how easily it collapsed. ... The thing really escalated on a scale we didn't anticipate.

When you took office, did you think: let's give them a chance?

We felt that there was hope in the situation. Also, I was seen as a pro-Nationalist, and I got some stick because of that, but I balanced Merlyn's approach. However, we got on together without any difficulty. But I realised that the longer we went the more difficult this problem is going to be. People used to say to me: What's the solution? I had no idea. We worked on removing problems between the two communities, proper housing, schooling, economic develpoment, investment... we did all these things. It didn't touch the surface. Sunningdale repeats itself again with the peace process, which I support. But it is a very long haul.

What was your view about ultimate withdrawal at that time?

The Protestants are in a majority. Take the Ulster Workers Strike, for example, when we were based at Stormont Castle. We came to the situation where I had meetings with Merlyn Rees and Frank Cooper in the middle of the room because we couldn't be sure about the Northern Ireland civil service, who were supposed to be loyal to the Crown. The room could have been bugged. They were prepared to eat grass.
This was the danger of the whole situation. When the Birmingham atrocities took place, we saw the other side of the coin was that there was outrage in Birmingham ... The reaction in Birmingham was such that in the factories there were marches condemning the Irish and the IRA, and calling for hanging and so forth. There was very strong pressure at that time for the re-ointroduction of capital punishment. When I talked to the Home Secretary at the time, Roy Jenkins, he was under pressure to introduce a bill for the re-introduction of hanging, and he resisted that. The government as a whole resisted. That was a pressure from the British public, who were exceedingly naive in many ways to what was going in Northern Ireland...

When you say to me, why didn't we do something about it: we took the firm decision that we belived in democracy in Ulster, and that we were in favour of a united Ireland by agreement, but what we were not in favour of was imposition.

What was the function of economic policy?

The idea was to try and buy support. It was a desparately poor area. It wanted investment. We got modern investment. I went to see employers, major people. We said: look, we need support, we need investment, we are prepared to assist you as a government. ... A great deal of money went in, the structure was improved. It didn't buy peace. The sound argument was: It is no good talking about a political settlement if we don't have an economic base that is acceptable. ... I was a Minister for Industry, and we did things that you couldn't possible do in any other part of the United Kingdom. So we did attempt in a serious way to create a sound industrial base, and it bore some fruit, but that in itself will not do.
Of course, we went to the United States. I went on the Barbara Walters show; we toured the country; we tried to stop them giving money to the IRA, and at the same time we attempted to attract financial investment. And we actually got financial investment. But it still didn't stop it.

Was there an awareness of inequality between Protestants and Catholics?

That was universally accepted. The Protestants had all the good jobs, in the civil servive, in industry, they had the key jobs... That was acknowledged, and that's what we set out to change, but not at the expense of the Protestant population.

Was there a reluctance to tackle the issue?

If somebody had come to the government and said: look, I have a solution to this problem, and it will cost 3 or 4 billion. We would have done it. But you are not going to have that situation.

Was the government pursuing independence?

I didn't believe that, and I didn't take Merlyn's view on that. I don't think he was prepared to go on the wall for that. It was an idea. We've taken decisions, we got the Republic to reverse the Constitution on the position of the church; we did all that. It still didn't alter the situation.
One could see that the problem was that in the Protestants were too dominant in the North. We were trying to balance the situation so that both communities would benefit.
I think that people in the UK are saying: we're going to withdraw, leave them to it. You can't do that. The effect on the mainland, with the Irish communities in Glasgow or Liverpool for example, would be terrible. We have a deep Irish movement into this society, and of course there are Protestant supporters as well.

Working-class unity?

Quite frankly, it is all about military control at the end of the day. The most powerful groups are the paramilitaries on both sides. When the British Army came back, there was a general feeling that we could move towards a more integrated society. We attempted that. We did many White Papers, but we were not really breaking through, and at the end of the day, the meetings between the United States President and the paramilitaries are more important.
For instance, in Derry, when the British Army came in, I was there, and there were no real weapons of any consequence. As soon as the Catholic community were convinced that they needed protection, then they supported the IRA. They would hide people, for example.
You had the New York Police, for instance: they were sending over heavy coats.. it's unbelievable. When you go to the United States, the most right-wing Birchites are pro-Republican. It strikes this chord of sentimentality with an Irish community that suffered so much over the centuries, both by Famine and British occupation.

In your view, what was the role of the Republic of Ireland?

They wanted a settlement if at all possible. The great problem is that in the South of Ireland, you feel that the North might be 3000 miles away. They don't want to know. We could work with them, but we didn't win every issue.

Would you agree that the talks to the IRA increased constitutional uncertainty?

You have got to talk to the IRA. That's where the power was. I had talks with the IRA. We flew them over into London. These meetings took place. Merlyn Rees was in London meeting the Provisionals, and I was in Dublin. We met the main members of the Irish government at the British embassy, and I hosted the dinner. We were in the middle of it, and the ambassador came over to me, and he said: the Prime Minister is on the phone. So I go to the phone, and the Prime Minister said: Stan, I better let you

know, Merlyn and I met the Provisionals. We didn't go into any detail, but I had to go back into that tiny room and tell the Irish government. I was not their favourite boy, I can tell you. Funnily enough, whilst you got that sympathy, they were bitterly opposed in the South to the IRA, especially the establishment.

Lord Orme, 21 August 2001

What was your reaction to the conclusions of the Quigley report?

There was a feeling amongst some people at the time who believed that the resolution of unemployment and industrial expansion would be the answer to the problem of Northern Ireland, and that it would have a dramatic effect on the political situation. I don't accept that. As you see throughout the world, there are many places, like the Middle East, where you are not in a position to resolve these problems through industrial and economic expansion. So, cosequently, we tried to improve matters economically, with investment. We saved the Harland and Wolff shipyard. We got industrial firms in Britain to keep investment, all on the basis that it might behelpful. But we were never under the illusion that it would resolve the problem.

Could you detect any change in the attitude of the Irish government?

In this particular period, the Irish government were very close to the issue, not least because it is their own people, and they feel very strongly about it. They also felt at that time that it was necessary to criticise the British government, to flex their muscles, and to show that they dealt with the issues differently. That ebbed and flowed. One day, they were highly critical. Two days later, they kissed and made up. Quite frankly, throughout the whole period, the Irish government was more or less kept on side.

How did you deal with the issue of border crossings?

It was an irritant. When we were out of government, as part of the Anglo-irish Parliamentary group, we spent two weekends visiting the border crossings where all sorts of events had taken place. There was a general feeling that it was like internment without trial: whilst it still existed, you would never going to resolve it. Also, it was a whipping boy. If something came out, and things were not going very well, the Irish government would pull out the facts and accuse us of what happened.

Do you think the Army crossed the border deliberately?

It was accidental in the majority of cases. I could not say that it was never done on purpose. There were incidents in which it was pointed out. But the Army were not getting carried away with it. Still, the irritant did exist.

With your majority in the House of Commons dwindling, was there a deal with the Ulster Unionists?

That's the reality of politics. It is bound to have an effect. The Ulster Unionists realised that they were at their strongest, and that the Nationalists were at their weakest. So, they are bound to use it. There were no formal negotiations with the Unionists, but a nod and a wink.... In the end, they got more seats. It was a sort of blackmail. But that's the reality of politics. As an Ulster Unionists, you have to weigh up: what are our strengths, what are your weaknesses. And they recognised that their votes in the House of Commons at that time were a strength. You would have never got them then to sit down in a government with Sinn Fein and the IRA, as they are today, if not for the huge Labour majority.

One difference between your approach and Mason's approach was that you talked to the IRA. Would you say it was justified?

Most governments have talked to the IRA. It's always a test for a government, what a marvellous prize if you could get peace in Northern Ireland. Whitelaw had that feeling, we had that feeling. So we spoke to the IRA. At the end of the day, any government has to sit down at the same table with the IRA. Every government wanted a solution, and if they could get it by talking unofficially to the IRA, they did it.

When the Constitutional Convention failed, what did you think at the time about how to proceed?

You just had to keep plugging away. Bringing in American influence. Merlyn worked very hard on it, produced a White Paper. It was a very lonely job. It was difficult in itself to get internment without trial. Everything was absolutely shattered. So you start again with bricks. You start again to try and get people interested, point out problems and difficulties, similarities. But we didn't find it easy. We just looked for another opening, for another development.

Bringing in American influence. What did that mean?

We tried in both security and investment. Americans did assist. It was a very useful thing for American presidents because of the Irish vote in the United States. Presidents have been exceedingly helpful. They all helped in a particular way. American influence was welcome very much. They used to put the Nationalists and the Protestants in a bigger league.

Lord Prior, 27 November 2001

Were you surprised by the Catholic support for the hunger strikers?

Yes. It came as a profound shock that Bobby Sands was elected to Parliament, and then, after his death, his agent. Neither of them could have been elected unless the Catholic vote had turned out in great strength to support them. There were a number of Unionists who kept saying at the time that a number of Catholics would not vote for violence, but when it came to the crunch they did. That came as a considerable shock.

What was your view of Sinn Fein?

As far as I was concerned, I didn't differentiate between Sinn Fein and the IRA. When I got to Northern Ireland, we had an opportunity to get rid of the hunger strike and the dirty protest for a comparatively small price. I felt the whole time that the hunger strike had a perpetuating cycle about it in that each time there was a death, marches took place, more plastic rounds were fired, more children were injured, and that fed on itself. We were never going to get anywhere near peace unless we were able to quieten the whole thing down. When I got there, there were signs that the hunger strike was running its course, in September 1981. Therefore, there was this opportunity to bring it to an end. The concession we had to make was to allow the prisoners to wear their own clothes. It seemed to me a price worth paying.

What was the political impact of the hunger strike?

Not very great in political terms. I don't think the public here in Britain took much notice of the hunger strike. It was surprising how little political impact there was to it. The general view was that the Irish were playing games. The political impact in Northern Ireland, of course, was immense. It divided the population more than ever.

Did it change policies?

No, I don't think it did at all, apart from the concession on prisoners' clothing. I don't think that that was a very major concession, nor was it one which had great political importance. I think, on the whole many people realised that the hunger strike was running out of steam, and that was the end of it.

Even in the longer term?

I think Sinn Fein began to win Catholic votes for a number of reason. First, the Catholics felt the SDLP was pretty wishy-washy. Secondly, I think that the Catholics in the ghetto areas felt that Sinn Fein was better at looking after them, their interests and their livelihoods than the SDLP. One began to see the growth of Sinn Fein. However, one didn't know what their growth was until we came to the elections for the Assembly.

When was the start of the Anglo-Irish process? Was it connected to the hunger strikes?

No. I think the Irish under Garret FitzGerald were becoming more active, and they set up their commission [the New Ireland Forum]. That began to move things more towards the Anglo-Irish Agreement. It was some while after I left, in 1985, before we got anywhere. By that time, Thatcher had realised that the sort of romantic Unionism which she had certainly taken on board from Enoch Powell and Ian Gow would not get us anywhere. And she therefore moved much more to get some agreement.

FitzGerald states that the main reason for the Irish government to start the Anglo-Irish process was the growth of Sinn Fein. Was there a similar fear on the British side?

No. I don't think there was a similar fear on the British side. I am certain, however, that FitzGerald was worried about the growth of Sinn Fein in the South, although in fact it didn't grow there.

What were the aims of the British government?

The British government's aims – the whole way through – were quite simple. First of all, to try and bring about peace. To try and stop the violence in any way we could. And yet recognising the fact that, until you had stopped the violence, you would not get any movement by the Unionists or Republicans to come to the conference table. It wasn't until a good deal later that one got the ceasefires, and then after that you could start to talk. That's what we were trying to do. To quieten the whole thing down, and then get some political movement. You would never solve the problem of Northern Ireland by force of arms alone, much as Dr Paisley and others thought you could. We did all we could to deal with it by more police and more intelligence and army, but that alone was never going to solve the problem.

Doing nothing was more dangerous than doing something?

I thought that one had to get some political momentum going. I am pretty certain that actually there wasn't much we could do. Bitterness was too great. They weren't yet tired enough of fighting the conflict. In the history of the Irish conflict, there are periods when they get fed up with fighting, and they want to have a bit of peace. You have to catch that moment. And they weren't ready in 1983-84.

You said you had little knowledge of the security forces' operations. Was that a problem?

I don't think so. You would not expect the Secretary of State to have day to day control. I had overall control; I saw the Army and intelligence people, and the RUC regularly. I didn't expect to be consulted on day to day security matters. That would have been totally beyond the role of any Secretary of State.

It came up in the context of whether there was a shoot to kill policy. There was never an official shoot to kill policy. In fact, anything but, because we knew that everytime the security forces did kill someone, there was going to be a further outbreak of terrorism from somewhere. So one tried the whole time to dampen it down. Undoubtedly, there were occasions when shooting did take place, and sometimes it had to take place and people were very nervous. There wasn't a shoot to kill policy, but given the circumstances, it was not surprising that there was a number of shootings.

Was there any realistic chance to toughen security any further?

Without putting the whole country onto a total war footing, there wasn't much else that could be done.

Internment?

Internment would simply not work. We merely locked up the wrong people the first time we did it, and without introducing it south of the border, it wouldn't have worked anyhow. You would have created a great deal more aggravation in the Catholic community, and you would have had a lot more trouble with the world as a whole. America would have been much more difficult to handle.

What was the influence of Irish America?

It wasn't all that great. One went across to the States and saw senators and tried as much as one could to explain what our aims were, and what we were trying to do. I don't think there was a great deal of understanding of what we were trying to do. I remember one of the Irish senators, Moynihan, when I spoke to him and told him what we were going to do, he asked me: what you are really asking me to do is to keep quiet. I said yes. I can't expect you to do any more than that but if you keep quiet, it would be a great help – and he did keep quiet.

When did you realise that the Assembly wouldn't work?

I realised that the Assembly wouldn't work when the SDLP said they wouldn't take part. I knew Sinn Fein would not, but I had hoped the SDLP would. The SDLP made a great mistake, and they have made msiatkes ever since. They never stood up for moderate Nationalist. They have always been looking over their shoulders what Sinn Fein was going to do. I think Sinn Fein gained the whole way along the piece.

As soon as the SDLP announced that it was not going to take part in the Assembly, it was a dead duck. One kept it going for a bit to allow a certain amount of steam to be blown off, and to show that we were genuinely committed to trying to find a devolved system. Devolution was not all that popular ever since Powell had tried to persuade Thatcher that Northern Ireland was as British as Finchley. Palpably, it isn't, it is Irish. Northern Ireland is Ireland. The Assembly was an effort of political progress which was simply ahead of its time.

Was devolution still the ultimate aim?

Yes, I think the aim in the long run was to try and find some means of power-sharing in Northern Ireland with a devolved administration. That was the only way in which you would ever make some progress.

Did Thatcher have a good understanding of the Northern Ireland problem?

I don't think that in the early years she had any understanding at all. She never understood that what she said had an impact in the South of Ireland. She began to take an interest just about at the time I left, but not really in the time before.

What was the impact of Thatcher's economic policies in Northern Ireland?

There was none. Thatcherism didn't exist in Northern Ireland at all. It was the one part of the United Kingdom where Keynesianism was still rampant. So much of Northern Ireland depended on governmental support. There wasn't an industry of any size in Northern Ireland which didn't have some subsidy of one sort of another. Once, when Margaret Thatcher came across, we had to go by road, and she saw the wonderful roads and all the new housing, and she said to me: Jim, we are spending too much money here. And indeed, we were spending a tremendous amount of money. They were very well off.

Northern Ireland gained considerably by the formula that was used for Scotland and Wales, and therefore was far more generously treated than England was. And on top of that, there was all the additional money that was poured in because of the security situation. Thatcherism was much more a tone of voice than an actuality. Thatcher did put a lot more money in things like the health service and pensions than she had ever liked to give the impression. She wasn't such an iron lady. Her tone of voice was very tough and strict, and that got us in so much trouble.

Of course, later Short Bros and H&W were privatised?

Not until much later on. By then, we had reduced the workforce at Harland from 7000 men to 3000 men. Likewise Short Bros. But yes, in time, it became inevitable, that there would be changes. It was a very much more generous policy than the one England had.

Was there a different policy from England in relation to housing?

Housing was so bad in Northern Ireland. There was all the problems of the mixed communities, and so we had to build houses in order to meet the needs of a divided community. Belfast had the worst housing of the British Isles. The only way you could do anything to improve that state of affairs was to build public housing. The only new private dwellings were on the farms.

Lord Merlyn-Rees, 6 March 2001

Did you think that Sunningdale was a viable structure?

When I took office, Brian Faulkner told me: I've been disowned by my own party, and those with us in the Executive are a small number of Unionists. The majority of Unionists are against us, and they did well in the election. That was on my mind, and I let the Prime Minister know Faulkner's views. My view was that we had to carry on as if it was going to work, but it wasn't going to work.

How would you describe the impact of the Loyalist strike on your government's commitment towards Northern Ireland?

In a strange sort of way, the Ulster Workers' Strike brought the province to a halt, and it surprised the IRA. There is a great belief, a stomach belief, amongst the Nationalists that we divided Ireland, but we didn't divide Ireland. The reality of life in Northern Ireland is that NI is a divided province. The working-class Protestants were Unionists; they didn't vote any other way than Unionists.
So, the fact that there was a strike did two things: first, any nice liberal solution to Northern Ireland, let's all get together, let's all work together, wasn't going to be. Second, the Ulster Workers' Strike showed how powerful they were. It meant one had to start again, one had to try.
The great weakness with the Sunningdale settlement was that it brought back a Council of Ireland, and the Council of Ireland – not power-sharing – brought down the Sunningdale Agreement. They saw it as a plot. Everyone saw plots: when I went down to Dublin for a Rugby match, it was a plot. I was really going to hand over the North to the South. You can't. The reality of life is: Northern Ireland is divided. Like with the recent agreement, the idea is that Northern Ireland is a divided country.
Take, for example, the fact that there is nothing or very little happening on the arms front. What do you expect? They are that sort of people, they are twisters. They are never doing what they say they are going to do. You can't trust them. So, just as with the Ulster Workers' Strike, when you couldn't bank on the police, you couldn't bank on anybody. We were pretending that I was important. The only important thing about me was the Army, and the Army did a very good job.

Ulster Nationalism – what did you mean by that?

I think what I had in mind was: The Protestants began to mistrust British politicians. I just wondered, at the back of my mind, whether two sets of Nationalists – Catholic Nationalists and Protestant Ulster Nationalists – would be able to get together on purposes of government. Whether that could ever have happened, who knows, but they both thought the same way, that is, Ulster is different from the rest. And I was not so sure whether the Catholic Nationalists really wanted a united Ireland, or whether they were more concerned about Ulster than about Ireland as a whole. That's all I had in mind.

What impact did public opinion in Great Britain have on the formulation of government policy with regard to NI?

It's a bit like Europe where you'll find the thoughts on Europe are: Britain comes first. If there were a referendum on Northern Ireland at the wrong moment, people would say: let's get the hell out of Ireland, even if they kill each other, silly buggers. I am not saying that any political party would say that. I am saying that if you have a pint of beer in a pub, people would say: they are a waste of time.

What was the idea behind the Constitutional Convention?

The idea was if you can't come to agreement with the British government, meet amongst yourselves. We play no part whatsoever. We've got a judge to chair it, and they can put up their own scheme. They would get no parliament unless they had an Irish dimension, and a Protestant dimension.
There had to be an Irish dimension. That was more than many Protestants could stomach. Their feeling was: the Irish are cheats, you can't trust them.

What was your view on the role of the Irish government?

The Irish dimension, as far as I was concerned, meant: We met them, we talked to them, but not nearly to the degree that Mrs Thatcher had with the Hillsborough Argreement. Still, you had to consider some form of Irish dimension. You had to consider it because Nationalists in the North are more than a third of the population. Their views had to be taken into account. You cannot treat Northern Ireland as if it is Lancashire or Yorkshire, or even Scotland. I know that the Scottisch want to talk about independence, but Ireland is a place apart with hundreds of years of history. It is a curious place.
...
Ireland has been there a long time. It is not like Mugabe. It's not a new subject. There's no new thinking. The thinking is down here in the stomach.

Was a function of the ceasefire to buy time?

You needed time, absolutely right. The ceasefire – we didn't seek it, they sought it. It gave me the chance of police primacy, to change the police. They didn't even have a good Criminal Investigation Department. It was a paramilitary force. It had to be turned into a proper police force. It's a very good police force now. It wasn't then. I tried to integrate the training that the police get here, and the ceasefire gave me time for that.

It limited their activity on the mainland. Was that part of the calculation?

It wasn't part of my calculation, it happened.

Some observers argue that by talking to the IRA and pursuing police primacy you increased the uncertainty about Westminster's ultimate intentions. Would you agree with that point of view?

Whatever you would clarify, they wouldn't believe it. There is no way you can pull out and let them get on. The Irish government hated us talking to the IRA, but there was an inevitability. Politicians from the South tell you this and that, but quietly they are concerned what would happen if Sinn Fein would stand for elections in the South. When I once said to Garret Fitzgerald: okay, the North is yours from 1 January, he went white in his face.
But you can't have it both ways. Either they complain about the army, and when you reduce the role of the Army, it is withdrawal.

Police primacy – in what way could it be made acceptable to both communities?

They have the same problem now. The police was a totem-pole to the Catholics, they were a totem-pole to the Unionists. What can you do? They were all believing that there was a great plot.
...
History repeats itself, and all you can do is to let the police change, the Special Branch, the CID, try and get more recruits and part-time recruits.

You argued that any new devolved government needed some powers of policing. Why did you think that was necessary?

It is a very difficult thing to do because they think you are giving the powers of policing to them, which means that they are going to interfere all the time. The British police system, on the other hand, is based on a local policing committee. The police must look after themselves. The politican doesn't interfere.
In the South of Ireland, the Gardai is very much under the control of the political parties. It isn't so here. Anyway, in Northern Ireland, I calculated that we have to have a power-sharing executive with policing powers. How far you could have gone down that road, whether you could have divided the police into two, I don't know. When I first got there, I tried to get them thinking about it, that is, to have – in the local areas – ordinary policemen not carrying guns, and another one carrying guns.

Your government emphasised the British financial contribution to Northern Ireland. Why?

Harold Wilson did that famously. It's a fact of life that if you want Northern Ireland to be independent, you have to supplement it with money. They don't have any. It's a poor country. So they would need money. We were reminding them of the financial contribution as a deliberate policy. It's a fact.

Was that a way of telling them that independence was not on the cards?

Yes.

Do you see any parallels between the Good Friday Agreement and your policy?

First of all, I was on my own. The Foreign Office didn't get involved, the American government didn't get involved. It was very much: There's Ireland over there, get on with it. There's a big change now with the American involvement, very powerful. What they have done with power-sharing and policing, for example, is all different from my ideas. They sit around the table talking to each other. If only they could find a way to get something out of the IRA on the arms issue. How they are going to get around this, I have no idea.

Sir Quentin Thomas, 20 February 2002

How would you define the role of the British government in the peace process?

You used the expression peace process, and that has become a familiar expression. In a way, it did not start as a peace process. It started as a new attempt to find an accommodation in Northern Ireland. We began by looking for a political process, that is, a process which bring together the two sides of the community in political institutions of government in the belief that that would help to overcome the old differences. We were looking for that in a process which involved those political parties who were committed to political and constitutional means. It was hoped that this would help to bring the violence to an end, but it wasn't, in essence, a peace process. That was an important side effect in the search for a political settlement. It was not a process that was designed around the interests of those that were engaged in terrorism. I stress that because a number of things that have been written about it put the IRA and Sinn Fein centre stage, as if the whole process was one about addressing their interests and bringing violence to an end. It was of course hoped that that would happen, but the original motor of the process was to involve the constitutional parties, and not Sinn Fein. Some of the accounts completely overlook the Brooke/Mayhew round of talks, which did not involve Sinn Fein because they were at that time not ready to abandon their campaign of violence.

What was the purpose of the back channel?

The purpose was to explore the possibility of bringing the violence to an end. The essential exchange in 1993 was to ensure that there were no misunderstandings between us, so that if they were to bring the violence to an end, they understood that they could join in the political process. It was no more than that. When I say that it had been hoped that the political process would bring violence to an end, it was hoped that it would do this in a number of ways. Negatively, if there was a vibrant political process going on and Sinn Fein were outside it, it was hoped that this would bring pressure to bear on them because they would be missing what would be an important event. Positively, we were hoping to show that there was indeed a constructive way ahead which would involve all sides of the community, and which would show that we were looking for a new dispensation politically which could accommodate all political views.

The British government was responsible for Northern Ireland. What we were trying to do was to bring good government, to ensure that there was justice for everybody, to ensure that there were political institutions that could accommodate interests of local people so that no one felt that he would need to resort to violence, and so that we would get peace and prosperity.

In Northern Ireland, we were responsible for everything. Within the island of Ireland, it was our responsibility to work with the Irish government, to promote a settlement that reflected the interests of the people of Ireland as a whole. It is an important aspect that an important section of the people of Northern Ireland saw things within the island of Ireland. That was a reality which we wanted to take account of.

Was there a turning point from constitutional talks towards the inclusion of Sinn Fein?

I think there was a shift. I would think it was a gradual shift. Different people will give different accounts. If you look at the accounts of some of the people that were active in the Irish government, you see that there is a certain retrospective adjustment of the record. It is quite interesting, if you look at the 1985 Anglo-Irish Agreement, you will know that a central thrust behind it – from Hume and FitzGerald more than from the British side – was the worry that Sinn Fein was becoming too successful. The idea was to marginalise Sinn Fein, something which you thought might have been a British project, but it was much more an Irish project. At that time, that was the central project for them. Somewhere around 1991/92, separately but to some extent in parallel, people began to realise – maybe John Hume had realised even earlier – that this was the wrong project. The project should not be to marginalise them, because it would fail, and because it was wrong in principle. If Sinn Fein represented a genuine political constituency, a genuine community, the better project was to co-opt them. There was a realisation, both in London and Dublin separately, that the smarter thing to do was not to marginalise them but to co-opt them on democracy's terms. That meant bringing violence to an end, and making it clear that we wanted the process to be inclusive, but at the expense of them abandoning violence.

Some of what has been written about it looks as if we were looking for a ceasefire – that was never the British government's position. It was looking for them to abandon violence, and then to come in on democracy's terms. Nobody does things overnight, and that's why it was complicated. There was a dynamic process. Some of the troubles we got into during the process were because of the presentation as something that was in a steady stage. You would have to say: you must abandon violence permanently, whereas obviously the reality was that Sinn Fein were ready to explore whether abandoning violence would be in a dynamic context which would enable them never to resume this.

Is it true that the Irish were very enthusiastic, whereas the British were trying to slow it down?

That is complete travesty. In the period, 1990-91, we had to work extremely hard to persuade the Irish side that it was worth to embark on another process. Their position was: we have had the great breakthrough with the 1985 agreement, you British might not have implemented it fully, you haven't fulfilled the expectations – if the problem is that the Unionists are boycotting it, then they must be left alone in the dungeon to learn better manners; it's wrong to start another process; the Unionists made it clear that they want to get rid of the Agreement, and any new process would therefore threaten the agreement; this has been a great advance for our people, you cannot persuade us to do anything at the moment. So, we had to work very hard to persuade them, firstly, that the situation was unstable, secondly, that any Agreement which alienated one part of the community could not be regarded as the final point. The Irish wouldn't claim that it was, but they were inclined to rest upon it. We were very conscious that it had produced the profoundly unsatisfactory result that the Unionist community was alienated and isolated. ...

At lots of stages in the process, we were making the running. The 1992 talks stopped because we could not persuade that it was a price worth paying to have a gap between the regular meetings of the sacred instituion, the IGC. We were thinking that we made progress, and we had to persuade them to extend the gap, and they didn't extend it. There came a point when they said: we can't go any further, we must have a meeting. Our judgement on that differed. As soon as it differed, we sought of ways to revive the process. It was we who pressed for some documents setting out the outline of a settlement, which in the end became the Frameworks. We gave the first draft of that to the Irish government in September 1993. It was months before we got any draft back. We were pressing and pressing and pressing. It was partly because they, as we now know, were engaged in other explorations with Hume and Sinn Fein.

By that time, they had come to the view that the only game in town was the peace process, and they weren't ready to invest in the political process. We, however, did not see the two as in conflict. We saw the two as complementary. We saw the best hope was to carry forward the political process, and I think we were right. I believe that was a crucial part of enabling both the Unionists and the Nationalists and the Republicans that we were ready to contemplate a settlement of sufficient ambition for them all to join. We were pressing for that, and at a lot of the stages, we were making the running.

The crucial difference between us was that we were like the good mother. Our main interest was for everyone else to be happy. There was no primary British interest which overrode the interest of keeping everyone happy. That is not true of the other parties. Sinn Fein wanted a united Ireland, the Unionists wanted Northern Ireland to remain part of the United Kingdom, the Irish government had a

nationalist agenda. That meant that they all had an interest in promoting a particular point of view in the press. That's why you get a very clear picture in the media: the Irish were pressing, they were imaginative, the Unionists were going this, Hume was doing that. The British government often lets its case go. While it was very annoying to see all this press stuff going on, it wasn't in the end in our interest to run down other people. In the end, our greatest interest was to bring everybody in. It would have been very good to have done briefings against Dublin, the Unionists, anyone. But we had to keep saying to ourselves: what is our interest here? It is not to promote the position of the British government, it is to promote a settlement.

Who was responsible for the deadlock on decommissioning?

I think we probably came up with it first. If you look at the secret correspondence in 1993, one of the things we did in those messages was to attempt to set out that if they abandoned violence, they could come into dialogue. You start with exploratory dialogue, and in November we said that this dialogue would start three months after you stop violence. We set out what would be the agenda of these talks. They were three things: how you achieve progressive entry into constitutional politics, how you take a part in talks, and the practical consequences of the ending of the violence. Everyone knew that that meant both decommissioning, demilitarisation, and indeed prisoners. When we met them in December 1994, we made it clear in the opening statement, that this would include getting rid of the arms. By then, the Irish had adopted the same position publicly. Dick Spring, for example, famously said in the context of the Joint Declaration that it implied the handing up of arms – remarks which he subsequently regretted. One of the problems with decommissiong was that the Irish side would quite often get excited, they would be told by somebody that they would decommission, and then they would make a public statement. Then, they would get another message that it can't be done, and they would consequently change their position. But by the time of the second message, everyone's expectations would have gone up. In my view, it was not the right issue to concentrate on. But we all got caught up in a spine.

Was it an aim of British government policy to strengthen Adams?

No. I don't think that would be true to say. I think it is the case that we regarded Sinn Fein and the IRA and the Republicans as a fairly coherent political movement. There were obviously different views – you can compare them with the Conservative Party. Many political institutions are a lot more monolithic. Sometimes we had this debate: can Adams deliver? The view I always took on that: look, these are very effective political leaders. It is a crucial preoccupation of theirs whether they can carry movement without it splitting. Every political leader worries about that, because it may not only have a political consequence, they might get shot as well. If they judge that they can make a move, it is no good us assessing it better than them. We let them do that. On the whole, I don't think we said: let's help Adams, let's help McGuinness. They were a coherent political movement, they would make their assessment of what they could or couldn't do.

Did the inclusion of Sinn Fein mean that the DUP would fall off the table?

No. It is worth remembering that some of the arrangements made in the final phase of the talks were adopted very much in the hope of including the DUP. It was in 1994 or 1995 that the DUP made the point publicly that it was very difficult for them, but that they were sitting down with Sinn Fein people in District Councils because they had to do business with them. There was a suggestion that if there was an election to the political process we would have to sit down with Sinn Fein. When Mitchell produced his report in January 1996, he included a slight reference to the idea that there should be an election, which John Major seized on. Hume said it was an awful idea, Bruton had a tantrum for a fortnight, and then decided that it was actually a good idea. One reason why the British side seized on that was because the UUP and the DUP had suggested that they could sit down with Sinn Fein. When it came to it, the DUP did not find it possible to do that, but it was partly in the hope of including a wide range of Unionism that that mechanism was promoted by the British side.

Why did you drop the third of the Washington principles?

I think it is fair to say that in the process there was a progressive adjustment of expectations on decommissioning from everybody. We had hoped there might be decommissioning during the talks, which is why Mitchell suggested it. There was a hope that if it couldn't be done during the talks, it would certainly be done when it came to the Good Friday Agreement. It didn't, so we had to go on. Everyone had to lower their expectations on that subject. Maybe we were wrong to do so, maybe we should have never started with it.

Do you think the decommissioning issue was to give reassurance to the Unionists?

I don't think you can blame it on the Unionists. I am afraid to say that it was something that the British government started. The Unionists only joined in later, because they had to. If the British government says so, of course the Unionists had to. It's both the right issue and the wrong issue. It's the wrong

issue in that if you got a situation of dynamic change, which we had in the sense that we had situation of converting a movement that was engaged in physical force into a wholly democratic political movement. Anyone who manages political change knows that it is difficult to judge the moment when you take on those within your movement who have the strongest views, and you try and manage things. Look at the way John Major's government handled the European question: they tried not to confront those who wanted a more eurosceptical position. That is what one imagines Sinn Fein would do with those within its movement who thought that the ceasefire was a mistake. The bad thing about decommissioning was that it kept inviting the Sinn Fein leadership to confront those within their movement who they did not want to confront for perfectly normal political reasons.

The reason why it was a good issue is because the position of the British government, the Irish government, the Unionists and the SDLP was that we would deal with Sinn Fein on the basis that they had renounced violence. Of course, everyone knew that it was complicated than that. You hoped that they would come to a position where they would renounce it, but we all had to pretend that it had already happened. If that is your position, it is impossible to justify why they needed a private army, why they needed guns. It forced everyone else to acknowledge that they hadn't really given up violence. They hadn't quite yet.

Do you think that the dwindling majority of John Major had any impact?

That's been overplayed by Irish commentators, and by people in the Irish government. It was much more a question of trying to reassure the Unionists, so that they could be kept in the process. Of course, there were members in the Cabinet who were particularly sensitive to a Unionist point of view, and that was quite important. That may have been more important than the parliamentary arithmetic. I think the dynamics within the Cabinet may have been more significant. I think, in any case, that it is better to think of it in terms of the imperative of keeping the Unionists in the process, and reassure them that it was the right thing to do. I think we have seen since how close the Unionists were to fracture over this whole process.

Do you think the British government won the conflict?

No, that's quite the wrong analysis. The correct model is whether one could find arrangement so that everyone could see that the conflict was unnecessary, obsolete, and that there were better ways of doing things. We may have won an argument if we have demonstrated what Peter Brooke enunciated in 1990, that is, that there was a settlement available, and that it was a settlement which would not involve compromising anyone's vital principles or essential interests. When he said that, everyone laughed at him. I hope we may have won that argument.

Peter Viggers, 28 November 2001

Was there a link between peace and prosperity?

I am a banker and a businessman by background. When I was appointed to the government in Northern Ireland in 1986, I regarded it as a business job. To try to improve the Northern Ireland economy, and by promoting employment and prosperity, and by finding more jobs for the minority community, my effort was intended to be a small part in the pattern of improving prosperity, understanding, removing causes of dissention and difficulties.

It was not a case of giving everyone a job and then the conflict would disappear?

No, there's much more to it than that. One of the causes of the conflict was justified concern amongst the minority community. By diminishing that sense of resentment, one could try to improve the overall pattern. It doesn't eliminate all the problems, but it's one part.

When you went abroad, what were your main arguments why people should invest in Northern Ireland?

Very good workforce, part of the UK, benefiting from highly intelligent workforce with a good record, your best road into Europe, and also – of course – we would give you support.

How would you address the conflict?

In the case of one of the largest investments that was made over there, we arranged for the people who were planning to invest to discuss the issues of security with the police force, and they were very assured by that. And then, there's a standard pattern for every minister in Northern Ireland, to say, as soon as people got off the aeroplane, to say: well, did you hear any bombs? Of course, you didn't, because that's what it's like for most of the population. Most of the population live ordinary peaceful

lives. The violence is on the margins, you can talk to other people who have invested here, and their record is that they are happy to here.

Did Thatcherism exist in Northern Ireland?

I sometimes thought that I was the only Thatcherite in Northern Ireland. I was embarrassed by the size of my departmental budget. I had about £500-600m a year as a budget in the Department of Economic Development and the IDB, and that was very much discretionary expenditure than any of my colleagues had. I had a huge budget, and I was not inhibited in any way by money. I was urging a harsh, tough business-like line with not just Harland but with Short Bros, but I was almost on my own in that. We simply couldn't just throw money at these companies. We wrote off £850m from Short Bros, and we wrote off a smaller amount from Harland & Wolff. That was done to maintain jobs in Northern Ireland.

Was the British government more lenient in Northern Ireland than on the mainland?

The Treasury was urging us to take similarly robust line in Northern Ireland. There was a lot of reaction to that. I told people that the laws of economic gravity apply in Northern Ireland as much as anywhere else. The rain falls downwards, and companies that make losses should go out of business. That's an economic rule.

We were concerned about displacement. What was certainly true was that certain large companies became extremely adept at working the system. They would get a grant that was upfront, and then they would get employment subsidies that were phased. You could time it, when they got the last grant, they just came back. One company came back about every five years, saying that it was about to close and needed more money. There would be enormous social pressure, and that the community couldn't afford to lose these number of jobs, and it was an important prestigious project. So, in the end, we subsidised it again.

Can you tell me the reasoning behind the decision not to give grants to Conway Mill?

The advice we were given was that it would be no appropriate this venture. We were advised that the links between the individuals concerned and terrorism were such that it was not appropriate to support them.

Was the Fair Employment Act a result of American pressure?

I became persuaded that it was necessary to have some measure of discrimination to bring jobs to the minority community. I think it is true that the Irish and the Americans were indeed influential in pressing on this. But basically, it was a matter of fairness. The Irish government left us in no doubt what it would like something to be done. They have always been in favour of measures that were favourable of the minority community, and they perceived it as one of them. At the governmental level, I am not aware of pressure from the Americans.

Can you recall any representations that were made to you?

Business people regretted and resented the increased pressure of bureaucracy, and I sympathised with that. I don't like restrictions and regulations. It was Kevin McNamara who was a leading voice at the time. He would have liked us to go much further and have positive discrimination, which we tried to avoid. It was an impossible line to draw between having rules that work and positive discrimination. It is very difficult to put employers in a situation where they need to employ a few more Catholics without imposing sanctions, lists and percentages. I was least happy with dealing with that legislation.

Were you afraid that this law would lead to disinvestment?

Yes, and lack of efficiency. Every burden you put on business is something that is damaging on jobs. We hoped, by providing a well-run, efficient, prosperous economy, that people would realise that they didn't need to discriminate, that they didn't need to feel that they were discriminated again, and that there would be an enhancement of the general feeling of understanding.

Do you think that during your period of office that there was some prospect of political progress?

It was very imperceptible. It was like watching paint drying. It was rather that we were holding the line, and that we were hoping that the broader things we were doing in terms of promoting fair employment and prosperity, that those things would change the environment and people's views. We were hoping that people would get tired.

Sir John Wheeler, 18 February 2002

1993 was the first year in which there were no killings by the security forces. How do you explain that?

I can't explain it in the sense of any policy reasons. The answer to that must be no, because the security forces would respond to individual incidents. If life was threatened, and if life could have been saved by opening fire in accordance with the rules, they would have done so. There was no policy directive which said: you mustn't fire under any circumstances. Indeed, the ordinary rules, as laid down in the rule of law, applied. So, it was coincidence rather than by design.

In my period, with a new GOC and a newish Chief Constable, techniques and the intelligence gathering process was changing all the time. In fact, I made it my business to work intensively on improving our intelligence capability, because that was the key both to the political process as well as to the counter-terrorist policy.

How would you improve intelligence?

A key issue was to make all the intelligence gatherers work together, and to pool intelligence. If you really want to bring about a change in terrorist behaviour, you have to create a climate whereby they are frightened to commit crime because they fear either apprehension and the judicial process leading to imprisonment, or being caught in a cross-fire situation whereby they get killed. After 1993, 70 per cent of PIRA operations were aborted because they feared detection. It was that which was the turning point in the peace process which led to the development of the political dimension, that is, they could not win through terrorist actions, so politics had to be pursued more vigorously.

Was that one of the reasons why you said that the IRA is already defeated?

Yes. They couldn't win.

Did the British government know that the ceasefire imminent?

There were certainly indicators that something may be afoot. As we now know, it wasn't quite as genuine as we may at that time have believed. Some of that was orchestrated. But there was a change in the sense that the Provisional IRA could not win.

Did they say that?

I'd rather not say. It's too sensitive.

Did you know that the end of the ceasefire was imminent?

I believed it. We also had indications from intelligence.

Did you think that decommissioning was a political or a military necessity?

Both. We look at these questions through hindsight. At the time, the Parliament of the United Kingdom, the British public, the political forces in Northern Ireland, needed to understand what the Provisional IRA's intentions were. At the time, decommissioning, or a move towards it, was very, very important.

Could you describe how the security forces reacted to the ceasefires?

First of all, they asked: was it genuine? Was it going to last? I don't think anyone seriously believed that it would. I didn't. There was still little convincing evidence that we reached that stage in the process that it would last. There was no clear evidence that the Provisional Army Council, or Adams or McGuinness, had given a direct order to stand down. It was merely a suspension of operations. That was very important: it was not a stand down.

What was the purpose of the easing of some of the security measures in the wake of the ceasefire?

That was a decision made by the operational commanders, the Chief Constable and the GOC. They responded to circumstances on the ground, and it was entirely their call whether their personnel should change their head-gear, or their methodology of operating, or the frequency of patrols. Those were operational matters. They were not directed by Patrick Mayhew or by myself.

I do emphasise, with hindsight, that the circumstances of those days were very different to what subsequently happened. I never really believed in that ceasefire. I was receiving all of these intelligence reports, and I never really saw the evidence that it was for real. I thought that it was a tactical manoeuvre, part of a process, but not in itself an end position.

I talked a great deal to people. And I asked them how they saw events on the ground. It was a combination of all that the intelligence gatherers told me and what I picked up on my weekly visits which led me to be doubtful as to where the process was going at that moment in time.

Was there a deliberate switch from anti-state violence to street violence?

Yes, that certainly occurred. Their ability to use opportunities was very considerable, as it still is. When Sinn Fein said that they had nothing to do with it, I was under no illusions. That was absolute nonsense.

Was the whole Drumcree situation part of that?

Absolutely. That was completely orchestrated by the Provisional IRA. I did the route myself, I learned to understand what was going on, that is, how they got people on to the Catholic estate, how they manipulated, how they controlled, how they intimidated people.

What was your idea of how to deal with that?

There are many sides to this question, and they are both local, province wide, political. You have to use all your resources to thwart what was a very serious problem. It was not easy.

Do you think the situation in Drumcree in 1996 could have been prevented?

I doubt it. The forces that were at work were determined upon confrontation, and neither side in that situation were prepared to give way.

Some people argue that the IRA had to keep their people busy. Do you share this view?

No. The Provisional IRA is an extraordinarily disciplined organisation. If Adams or McGuinness said you'll do it, you do it, otherwise you will be killed. The Provisional IRA isn't a loose ill-disciplined band – it is very disciplined. That's the whole point

How was security co-operation with the Irish Republic?

Excellent. It advanced. It was very much driven by personalities. I regarded it as good.

What was your view of the Loyalist organisations?

They were pure thugs. They were relatively easy for the RUC Special Branch to penetrate. They were very different in character from the Provisional IRA, so it was possible to deal with them differently and separately. They are also a very divided group of people, so you could pick them off, faction by faction, relatively easy.

As a former finance minister, were there efforts to make the peace felt in terms of a 'peace dividend'?

Patrick Mayhew and the late Baroness Denton worked very hard on attracting inward investment so as to stimulate prosperity and jobs, particularly in the Catholic areas, where there was still some disadvantage. On the whole, that worked relatively well. It was all part of the process of dealing with terrorism. You have to address the causes of it, insofar as they can be identified. It is very important that you should do that.

What was the purpose of the TV advertisements against terrorism?

I thought a great deal about how you counter terrorism, and how you mobilise the huge majority of people who were against it, regardless of how they were on the Catholic or the Protestant side of the community divide. People were horrified by it. So, supporting the great majority of people was important. It was also important to show how they could participate in the campaign against terrorism.

Did you think that the conflict was coming to a close at that time?

I think that would be an oversimplification. It was a very complex process that was constantly changing. It was a day by day assessment as it moved. It was much more of a progressive development: looking at opportunities, thinking about how one should respond, how can one get the best advantage in moving towards a peaceful Northern Ireland, how do you make politics work. You had to do so many different things at the same time in order to make the process work.

Do you think Major was inhibited by the dwindling majority in the House of Commons?

No. He was inhibited by the Provisional IRA. They would not address the issues that concerned the majority of people in the United Kingdom and in Northern Ireland: why are you armed, why are you killing people, why do you need Semtex? That was the central issue.

Tony Worthington, 19 March 2002

What did you consider the biggest achievement of the Major administration, which then helped you to secure agreement?

We had pursued a bipartisan policy with them for the reason that it looked like we were going to be the government. If we were giving the impression that it would be different under Labour, we would be undermining their strategy. That was very important. We worked very closely together in the Major years, so that it was like a joint inheritance. I think the area of difficulty was that they hung themselves up on the decommissioning issue by saying that prior decommissioning had to happen. That became an obstacle, and it was a difficulty with regard to progress with the Nationalists.

Most importantly, there was a process under way. Our achievement was that Mo put an enormous amount of work into preparing for government, so that we would be over there very frequently. We knew the people, and if you look at the time, there was a sense that we hit the ground running. There were quite extraordinary scenes when Mo went over and was mobbed by the crowds. She was extraordinarily welcome. That had never happened before to a Secretary of State. It was an indication that she was already known.

We had policies worked out on policing and education. They were working documents for any incoming governments. It was very helpful that the process was under way, but we had to built on that by making sure that the process was not undermined by us when the Tories were in government, and secondly, by making sure that there was not a slackening in speed but an intensification when we came to power.

Were there any other discontinuities or difficulties?

No. Everyone is seeking to achieve the same thing, peace and a reasonable settlement. The problem is that 10 years ago, they could have written the Belfast settlement. They knew what the components would be. All these things everyone knew – it was about how to get from A to B. There was not really any difference between the parties.

What we did in opposition, and which was very important, was to drop our previous policy of unity by consent. That was a very strange policy, going back to 1981. It was utterly unattainable.

Did you still encounter some suspicions because of your previous policy?

Sure, of course. For a very, very long time, Kevin McNamara had been the Secretary of State, who quite clearly thought – like the majority of the parliamentary Labour party – that the case for a united Ireland was overwhelming. They didn't feel any affinity to the Unionists, and believed that the Catholic minority in Northern Ireland had experienced intense discrimination. A Labour Party was always going to be treated very suspiciously by the Unionists. But I think we overcame a lot of that simply by doing things, having real policies, rather than drifting along.

We tried to get people talking about non-border issues. An enormous amount happened in the first six months. It was the momentum. I don't think we would have got where we are if we hadn't know where we were going. We picked up the Major legacy and ran with it. We knew where we were going to, and that was a major achievement.

Is it true to say that the British government was the talks only participant who had no selfish agenda?

We were a broker, we were partisan for progress, and that's inevitably so. Peter Brooke's statement about 'no selfish interest' was very wounding to the Unionists, but it was true. There's a lot of sentiment in this country according to which we should have let people get on with it. There's no sympathy for the Unionists who claim to be British and don't seem to be British in terms of their behaviour. This passionate allegiance to religion, for example, was very un-Church of Englandish.

The British government was the only actor who could not afford to be partisan...

You knew that it was impossible to do anything without it being seen as partisan. You can't give too many pro-Catholic, or too many pro-Protestant, decisions in a row. In order for people to think that you are fair, you have to make sure that the other community are fairly treated in the next announcement. You are conscious of it. You will inevitably be seen as partisan. You will try not to be partisan, but it's almost impossible. Every move you make is seen in a partisan environment.

The Unionists would thus not see the British government as their natural allies?

That's bound to be so. The Unionists have always voted with the Tories. We had this fellow, Robert McCartney, who said that he was a socialist. He sat with us for a few months until we upset him on something, and he then decided to sit with Paisley.

What was more important in your view – to address the issue of inequality, or to create more jobs for everyone?

That was an area where two things were affecting the economy. One was that, in terms of the economy, it is the UK government's policy which applies across the country. Things like the "New Deal" are reserved matters. But within the broad parameters, emphasis can be put on areas of deprivation. That they happened to be more often Catholic areas was the fact of the matter. You already had legislation on the equality dimension which got applied more intensively. All the employers had to demonstrate that they had equal opportunities policy. You knew all the time how the appointment of staff would be interpreted. It would again be interepreted as "one of us" or "one of them". In terms of rights legislation, Northern Ireland was far ahead of the UK.

The major piece of legislation in that respect was the Fair Employment Act. Was the closing gap between the communities due to this piece of legislation, or was it because of the improving economy?

It's all these things and education as well. Catholics were becoming more middle class, which again has to do with education.

Was it implicit to the Targeting Social Need programme that Catholic areas were tackled predominantly?

If you're finding deprivation that is unacceptable you have to put it right. The trick is to do it in a way that doesn't level people down, always being conscious that people living in property were a provoker of disruption. It was a provoker of terrorism, of crime.

The explicit purpose of the legislation was to end unfair inequalities. You were trying to do that for Catholics and Protestants. If you came across a deprived Protestant area of Derry, you were making sure that resources were going to it. If you got two groups of poor people, you are not helping Derry, you are just providing the fuel for further trouble.

What did you think about Sinn Fein's argument that you had not really tried to bring investment into Catholic areas?

I had a number of feelings about that. The reverse argument was that it suited the Sinn Fein cause quite well not to have success in those areas. If you had a successful incoming industry, which was thriving in their heartlands, then the central plank of their argument about the vicious unfairness of the British state would not be understood anymore.

Was it your intention to bring a peace dividend to Northern Ireland, to make the economic effects of peace felt?

You couldn't say that suddenly there was Good Friday. That argument was pursued by both governments for a long time. It was a time of expansion for the Northern Ireland economy. There were a lot of improvements. Unemployment levels were falling – there was a peace dividend, and people saw that.

Whenever we went to the Treasury, we received a sympathetic hearing within the resources that were available. Whenever we approached the Prime Minister, it was absolutely clear that one of our top agenda items was solving Northern Ireland. There was a huge momentum in that year, and we were trying create that sense of movement.

Letters to author

Lord Callaghan of Cardiff, 26 July 2000

Rt Hon Lord Callaghan of Cardiff KG

HOUSE OF LORDS

26th July 2000

Dear Mr. Neumann,

Thank you for your letter about your PhD course on British Strategy in Northern Ireland. I am sorry to say that I do not now give interviews, but you may find it helpful to refer to two books under my name: *A House Divided*, which is about my experience as Home Secretary in Northern Ireland, and was published in 1972; and *Time and Chance,* which is my autobiography and was published in 1987. I have little to add to the accounts that are contained in the books about the issues you raise.

Ministers at Stormont were always resistant to interference in policy matters by successive United Kingdom Governments, although they relied on the United Kingdom for support through public finances. As the years went by and up until 1968, Westminster Governments held the driving reins very loosely and as a consequence, discrimination in housing, employment and in other social areas grew up that would not have been tolerated on this side of the water.

As to the 1968 - 70 series of reforms, it is obvious that the strategic objective of the IRA for a united Ireland could not have been removed by any domestic measures. But it would be fair to say that if the reform and change which I initiated had been followed up vigorously after 1970 when I left office, and if the Catholic community had continued to feel that their problems were being addressed, the IRA would never have had such fertile soil in which to plant ther revival, and the worst of the troubles might have been avoided.

With best wishes for the success of your studies,

Yours sincerely

James Callaghan

Mr Peter Neumann
41 Gosling House
Sutton Street
London E1 OAU

Sir Edward Heath, 22 February 2001

The Rt. Hon. Sir Edward Heath, K.G., M.B.E., M.P.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

22 February 2001

Dear Peter Neumann.

Thank you for your letter of 19 February 2001.

The answer to your question is exactly the opposite from what your critics are saying. The decision indicated our belief that the power-sharing executive in Belfast would continue in the same way as we expected the Westminster Government to remain in office.

This would have been the case had Harold Wilson, the Prime Minister, supported the power sharing executive at the time of the crisis in May, and put down the strike.

Yours sincerely

Edward Heath

Mr Peter Neumann
41 Gosling House
Sutton Street
London E1 0AU

Marjorie Mowlam, 6 March 2002

Peter Neumann
59 Braybrook Street, London W12 0AL
email: Radioauslondon@aol.com

6 March 2002

Dear Mo,

Many thanks for your letter. I understand that you are hard-pressed for time, and indeed I look forward to the publication of your book. I am very grateful, therefore, that you offered to help me with some of my questions on your time in Northern Ireland. Expecting many of my queries to be dealt with in your book, I tried to make the list as short as possible.

1) Is it fair to argue that you essentially continued the approach of the previous government when Labour took over in May 1997? YES

2) Do you think that there continued to be mistrust on the Unionist side because of Labour's traditional policy of 'Irish unity by consent'? a little yes

3) Do you think that the size of your majority in the House of Commons had any impact on the Unionist attitude during the negotiations?
No - but a small majority of the Tories did.

4) How did you convince the Unionist leadership to drop the demand for prior decommissioning? run the 2 sections in parallel - decommng running forward on implementing the GFA.

5) Was it your government's intention to strengthen the position of the Sinn Fein leadership, particularly after the split in Republican ranks in December 1997? It was an intention to negotiate a peace process

6) What needed to happen for you to exclude either Loyalist or Republican parties permanently from the talks? Where would you have drawn the line?
I drew it as clearly as was needed in the interests of the time

7) Given that the British government, as the constitutional authority in Northern Ireland, was bound to act as an 'honest broker' whilst the Irish government was free to be partisan and side with Nationalist interests, was there any of conflict between the two governments? No & we got on well in the negotiations

8) Many Conservatives have argued that the government should have insisted on a clear linkage between prisoner releases and decommissioning. Did you pursue this idea? If yes, why couldn't it be realised? - what was done was agreed in the GFA.

9) Did you always expect prisoner releases to be part of an overall settlement?
It was part of GFA

10) Republicans have coined the term 'securocrat'. Did you encounter any reluctance to change on behalf of the security forces? Were there any conflict of interest between Army/RUC and the government because you found change as difficult as any other human being.
No conflict between army & RUC - security forces

Sir Hugh Rossi, 5 July 2001

Utilisateur1

From: "Hugh Rossi" <hughrossi@worldonline.fr>
To: "Peter Neumann" <neumann@europe.com>
<neumann@europa.com>
Sent: 05 July 2001 14:25
Subject: Northern Ireland

Your letter of the 25th June cleverly sent to my daughter's office has just reached me at my home in SW France where I remain for the summer until 25th. September. I don't think you would find easy or economic to come here as we are in a remote area. You could 'phone me in London after my return there on 020 7937 1631. However, I can comment briefly on the point you raise.

HMG, in 1979-8, followed the line very strongly taken by Margaret Thatcher; namely, that for as long as the majority of British Subjects living in N.Ireland wished to remain such under the Crown it was the duty of any British Government towards them to ensure their protection to do so. It was exactly the logic of this policy that dictated her attitude towards the Falkland Islanders.

As I asked Republicans during the period I was there as Finance Minister spending about £2.5billion on a population of 1.5million - 'what did it profit the British administration to be there - uranium, oil, gold, other rich resources? Even the chief industry- agriculture- was a financial drain . If I could spend the same money, even pro-rata, in my own consituency, I could guarantee my re-election in a highly marginal seat for life. I could be tempted!'
The reply I always received north and south of the border was -'don't be hasty Minister'!

No doubt, historically from the time of the Spanish Armarda down to World War II, GB had a great strategic interest in a strong military presence in Ireland. By the 1960s, the Geo- politics of the world had rendered this both impratical and unnecessary.

I hope these thoughts are of some help. Hugh Rossi.

Re. Neuman

I have tried to mail you, but the Sever would not recognise your address. Hence this will come by Amail.

R.

07/07/0[illegible]